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Jesus and Tolerance

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Editorial

Growing religious intolerance in today's India questions the basic Indic attitude of tolerance and openness to celebrate plurality in all aspects of life. Unfortunately, the fundamentalist forces are destroying the basic principle and the world-view of Indian culture, namely, the respect for even contradictory religious beliefs, philosophies and ideologies. When political parties manipulate religious sentiments of the people of the majority religion to secure power by demonizing the minorities in any country, it destroys the harmonious social fabric of a nation. The real moral strength and integrity of a nation lie in the way it treats its minorities. The magnanimity of the majority to make the minority feel secure and recognized and the openness of the minority to live in solidarity and cooperation with the majority determine the health of a nation. The increase of violence against the people of minority religions, destruction of their places of worship and their institutions in India today is a symptom of the ill-health of our nation. If the acts of violence perpetrated against the minorities go unchecked and not remedied at the right time, it can polarize, divide and destroy not only the social fabric of the nation but also the nation itself. Jesus says, "A house divided against itself, that house cannot stand" (Mark 3:25). It is obvious that a divided nation can easily be destroyed by its enemies. Therefore, the fundamentalist forces that divide the nation and ferment hostilities between religious communities and groups leading to violence are the real anti-nationalists though they claim to be nationalists.

The propaganda of the votaries of a cultural nationalism identifying it with the religion of the majority of the people of this country is not bought by a large number of Hindus who value both religion and universal human values. But the subtle ways of poisoning the minds through false anti-minority propaganda creating fear and insecurity

may influence at least some people in the long run who are not at present swayed by the false propaganda of the Hindutva brigades. The danger to the unity of the nation lies in separating cultural nationalism from territorial nationalism and identifying the nation as a holy land. It would have its immediate consequence on the people belonging to the minority religions as well as the Dalits who are believed to be the pollutants of the holy land. Any sacralisation of the land will eventually justify the claim of the oppressing castes and classes that they can possess the land as their divine right at the cost of the people who they say do not belong to the holy land or *punyabhoomi*. At the root of the so called cultural nationalism is the greed for power both political and economic and its benefits and the crude and illegitimate pleasure that one gets from dominating, subjugating, discriminating and oppressing the other. Evoking hostility in the minds of the majority against the minority based on their difference in religious beliefs and practices or on how they dress or on what they eat instead of the attitude of hospitality known to be a sublime value of Indic culture is indeed a crime against the values of culture and our nation. In this context the discussion on tolerance and intolerance acquires our serious attention.

In the first article of this issue of *Jeevadhara*, "Jealous or Zealous God? Biblical Understanding of Tolerance/Intolerance", the author Mariapushpam Paul Raj argues that the polarization of the two images of God, namely, the intolerant and punishing God of the Old Testament and the compassionate and loving God of the New Testament does violence to the progressive Biblical revelation about same God of both the Testaments. This God is concerned about humans and their world. When the Bible refers to the jealous God, or the wrath of God etc. those expressions are to be understood in the context of God's passionate concern for the well-being of every human person and the entire world. The anger of Jesus is kindled against only those who practice injustice and thus dehumanize others and themselves.

In his article, "Tolerance and Intolerance in the Church" Isaac Padinjarekuttu explains how the historical development of the Church's attitude of initial tolerance towards everyone including her enemies to

an attitude of eventual intolerance to those who opposed her doctrines and structures and systems of governance. The Catholic Church was intolerant not only to some of her own members but also to other Christians and to the people of other religions. But the Church proved that it is capable of critical self-reflection and reform when it called all the bishops of the world together for a council fifty years ago, the Second Vatican Council. The author wishes that the Church continues the spirit of the Second Vatican Council which has opened the door to a more tolerant, compassionate and open Church.

The Indic attitude of tolerance is exemplified in the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. In his article, "Gandhi's Tolerance for Religious Pluralism: A Pointer to a Re-Reading of Jesus' Mission" A. Pushparajan presents the Gandhian understanding of tolerance which was also inspired by the Sermon on the Mount. Mahatma Gandhi followed Jesus' attitude of intolerance to evil and his attitude of forgiveness and tolerance towards those persons who commit evil. Through his non-violent movement against the oppressive colonial power and his eventual victory show that it is possible to be tolerant to the oppressors while being intolerant to the evil of oppression. In this article the author attempts to bring out the parallels between the attitude and actions of Gandhi and Jesus and proposes some practical suggestions for the self-understanding of the Church and its mission in the context of growing religious intolerance in our country.

In his essay on "Islamophobia and Islamic Fundamentalism: A Response" Ishanand Vempenny presents the complex picture of Islam today. Like other religions it has also its share of fundamentalist groups which do not tolerate other faiths and doctrines. The author argues that the Quran has seeds of openness and tolerance to other religions which can promote inter-religious dialogue and harmony among the people of different religions. The Islamophobia and the Islamic fundamentalism are two extreme positions. Both would do harm to Islam as well as to the followers of Islamic faith. According to the author the extreme positions can be overcome only by a reform in Islam as it happened in the Church through the Second Vatican Council and a re-reading of the Quranic texts in the changing contexts of today.

The word tolerance itself smacks condescension. It is a minimum requirement for living in a society without hostilities or for avoiding conflicts among people. But an evolved human mind goes beyond the minimum requirement of tolerance and lives a life of authentic human relationship of harmony and concordance with all. It respects the otherness of the other and cultivates an attitude of openness and concordance with those who oppose it and even with those who attempt to eliminate it. Jesus was such a one who challenged the social and religious system that oppressed the poor by marginalizing and discriminating them. Jesus challenged the forces of discrimination because of his love for the oppressed and the oppressors. He knew for certain that through their attitude and actions the oppressors were dehumanizing themselves. Jesus' attitude went beyond intolerance and tolerance to the rejection of dehumanizing systems which were accepted by the oppressors and he treated both the oppressors and the oppressed with self-emptying love.

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Jealous or Zealous God?

Biblical Understanding of Tolerance/Intolerance

Mariapushpam Paul Raj

A contextual, differentiated reading of the Bible, enables us to understand the tolerance or the intolerance of the biblical God in proper perspective. The biblical narration about God as a 'jealous,' 'wrathful,' 'revenge-taking,' 'killing' and 'sovereign' God is found both in the Old as well as in the New Testament. Such presentations about God do create an impression in the readers' mind that such a God is an intolerant God. In any case, the 'intolerance' that is attributed to the God of the Bible, is not the same as what we understand by 'religious intolerance' in the modern times. The God of the Bible is intolerant only occasionally, either with his own people who do not remain faithful to the commitment already made or with outsiders who themselves have become intolerant towards the rest. And this intolerance of the biblical God is aimed at either re-establishing the lost relationships or at re-establishing the lost justice through offences committed by the arrogant. Thus the God of the Bible is interested only in establishing the reign of love that embraces everyone without any distinction.

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Introduction

Marcion from Pontus in Asia Minor,¹ a second century Christian who went to Rome around the year AD 135, was the first one to

¹Cf. Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem I - III*, trans. Ernest Evans (Oxford Early Christian Texts, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), x - xi.

introduce an Early Christian canon of the Bible as he could not compromise the God of the Hebrew Bible with the God of the New Testament. He found the God of the Old Testament to be jealous, legalistic and punishing in contrast to the God of the New Testament who is a universal God of compassion, love, benevolence and mercy. Thus he started teaching a diathesis system, a two-God doctrine. This teaching of Marcion indicates that already from the times of the Early Church people have struggled to make sense of some of the stories in the Old Testament which present God as violent, jealous and punishing. Such a God appears to be 'intolerant.' In this short essay, we shall attempt to scrutinize this assumption and draw our own conclusions. We begin with clarifying what we understand by religious tolerance.

What is Religious Tolerance?

The term 'tolerance' contains a rather passive and prohibitive norm than active and affirmative. Etymologically the term is derived from the Latin *tolerantia* which refers to an 'acceptance' or a 'bearing with' or an 'endurance.' Technically, it would denote the margins or limits within which a value or a status can vary without causing problems to itself and in relation to persons the same would signify one's ability to suffer pain without getting harmed or damaged. Applied to human relationships it would refer to the readiness to allow an opinion or behaviour or even people to co-exist even when one disagrees with or opposed to them. It "involves acceptance or endurance of something which one has a negative attitude towards."² It means that those who practise it need not engage themselves in doing good to others, but it is enough that they refrain from doing any harm to either of the parties involved. Having admitted that the concept of tolerance entails merely a passive attitude and as such does not positively stipulate actions for a harmonious living together and integration of the various cultural milieu, yet it is necessary for a peaceful coexistence and for promoting life in the society at large.

² Jay Newman, "The Idea of Religious Tolerance," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15,3 (July 1978): 187. In this well spelt out article the author has successfully clarified the meaning of religious tolerance and proposed ways of overcoming intolerance.

In the Indian context today and perhaps also in the international scene the term 'tolerance' has gained a specific meaning and come to imply 'co-existence of different religious traditions.' However, in themselves the terms 'tolerance' and 'intolerance' could imply many things which are not related to faith or religion. Their implications could vary from someone putting up with someone else who is stupid or intelligent to someone's physique agreeing with some food or medicine. When we talk about tolerance in religious sphere then we are referring to an attitude which can be considered a virtue or a disposition just like courage or temperance. This attitude is directed towards those who belong to other religions than one's own and have different beliefs and behaviour based on such beliefs. Thus, religious tolerance does not mean accepting or enduring the *content* of the beliefs and actions of other religious people,³ but involves accepting or enduring *someone* who is holding such beliefs and models one's life on the basis of these beliefs.⁴ In the following pages we shall consider how the Holy Bible which forms the Sacred Scriptures of the Christians⁵ address the theme of 'tolerance' or 'intolerance.'

Tolerance in the Bible

What was said about Marcion at the beginning of this essay continues to be a widely spread opinion even today that the God of the Old Testament is a jealous, vengeful and punishing God, while the God of the New Testament is a merciful, compassionate and gracious one.⁶ However when one carefully reads the texts in the Bible which are related to this theme, one can easily discover that both the Testaments speak about one and the same God who is mostly tolerant and occasionally intolerant.

³ Sometimes tolerance in the religious sphere is considered to be a valid 'recognition of the doctrines of others even when they are contradictory to one's own convictions.' Cf. Joseph Veliyathil, "Religious Tolerance in India," *The Living Word* 78, 5 (September-October 1972):352.

⁴ Cf. Jay Newman, "Idea of Religious Tolerance", 188-89.

⁵ Our perspective is based on the Catholic version of the biblical books which includes the so called 'Apocrypha.'

⁶ Cf. Cardinal Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* (Paulist Press: New Jersey, 2014), 69-72.

In the NRSV translation of the Bible we find the verbal form 'to tolerate' occurring eight times and its cognate adjective 'tolerable' occurring five times. The adjectival form occurs exclusively in the New Testament (Mat 10:15; 11:22.24; Lk 10:12.14) and indicates the unbearability of the punishment by the ungodly on the last judgement day. Of the eight occurrences of the verbal form, three are related to God. In Ps 101:5 Yahweh declares that he would not tolerate a haughty look and an arrogant heart; in Mic 6:11 he cannot tolerate wicked scales and a bag of dishonest weights; and in 4 Esd 15:8 the Lord would not tolerate the wicked deeds against the innocent and the righteous. The first of the other five occurrences which are related to inter-human tolerance, namely, Esth 3:8 refers to a king not tolerating a people who do not follow his laws; the second in Rev 2:2 refers to the intolerance of the Church in Ephesus towards the evildoers and the third in Rev 2:20 to the Church in Thyatira which is rebuked for tolerating an evil woman Jezebel. The fourth occurrence in Sus 1:57 verbalises Judah's intolerance towards Canaan and the last one in 3 Mac 1:22 speaks about the citizens' intolerance towards their king.

By merely looking at the word group tolerate-tolerable in the Bible, one already receives a presentiment of what the Bible has to say on this theme of tolerance. It is a fact that both the God of the Bible and his people mentioned in it are *occasionally* 'intolerant.' Here the emphasis is on the word '*occasionally*,' because the God of the Bible, presented in both the Testaments⁷ is primarily merciful, compassionate and abounding in love and those who belong to him are also called upon to be kind and loving towards one another and towards the neighbouring people. And when the Bible describes God's intolerance and prescribes the same to his people, then it is done always in the interest of passionate concern for truth, justice and authentic faith.

Besides these few texts which explicitly speak of tolerance, there are other sections in the Bible which demonstrate a few other aspects

⁷ Though the Old Testament already strongly emphasizes the compassionate character of God and of his chosen ones, it is the New Testament which completes the process of God revealing himself begun already in the Old Testament. And therefore one must view God's revelation of himself in the Bible as one single revelation.

and characteristics of God which are closely related to the theme at discussion. Such aspects include the 'jealous' God, the 'wrath' of God, the 'avenging' God, the 'punishing' God who makes universal claims for himself. Given the scope of this essay it is not possible to make a detailed exegesis of all such texts. Yet we shall scrutinize a few of these aspects as presented in the biblical texts.

Jealous God?

The terms 'jealous' and 'jealousy' in the Old Testament render normally the English translation of the Hebrew *qannä*' (cf. Ex 20:5; 34:14; Deut 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; Num 25:13; I Kg 19:10.14) and its cognate *qin'ä* (cf. Num 5:14.30; Job 5:2; Prov 6:34; 14:30; 27:4; Cant. 8:6; Is 42:13; 59:17; Zech 1:14; 8:2).⁸ Sometimes this term refers to sheer 'envy' as in Gen 26:14 where the Philistines envy Isaac because of his prosperity (cf. also Gen 30:1: Rachel envying Leah and Gen 37:11: the brothers of Joseph envying him). At the same time these terms could also refer to strong emotions like 'anger' or 'jealousy' or 'zeal' which defend the possession of the beloved as we find in the case of Elijah who demonstrates his *qannä* for Yahweh by defending him as the one true God of Israel (cf. I Kg 19:10.14). Such a rendering is justified also by the translation of *qannä* into Greek *zealos*. These three terms 'anger,' 'jealousy' and 'zeal' that render *qannä*' and its cognate, can either be 'in favour of' or 'against' thereby expressing 'friendly' or 'aggressive' emotion. Such an emotion is expressed always in support of those who are dear to him somehow affected or abrogated of their rights and against those who cause such deprivation. In any case this jealousy is a strong force and in its destructive dimension it is associated with fire (cf. Zeph 1:18; 3:8) and anger (Ez 35:11; Deut 29:19) and in its saving dimension it is associated with pity (cf. Joel 2:18).

The Old Testament transfers this emotion to God in various ways. It does so in the context of Yahweh becoming jealous for his land (cf. Joel 2:18) because it has been attacked by the enemies. Interestingly the second half of Joel 2:18 contains the 'compassion' or the 'pity' of

⁸ Cf. John L. McKenzie, S.J., *Dictionary of the Bible* (Bangalore: ATC, 1976), 414.

Yahweh for his people which indicates that what is expressed by 'jealousy' is actually a concern for the land. Again Yahweh is said to be 'zealous' for his people (cf. Is 26:11) who remain faithful to him and acknowledge his name against other lords. Ezek 39:25 associates Yahweh's jealousy with his mercy which is expressed in his restoring the fortunes of his people. With the same emotion of jealousy Yahweh is said to be burning for the sake of Jerusalem and Zion, probably because the city had not yet been rebuilt (cf. Zech 1:14). The 'zeal' of the Lord is also said to take initiative for saving his own people (cf. I Kg 19:31, Is 37:32). In all these instances the term 'jealousy' is used in support of the specific cause such as land, people and Jerusalem referred to in the respective context. The objects which receive the support from Yahweh here are somehow or other 'affected' parties.

There are also other passages in the Old Testament where the same term is used to express the anger and the hostile feeling of Yahweh. This hostile feeling as 'jealousy' is directed not only against the nations but also against the people of Israel themselves. He is jealous against the nations because either they have not recognized the divinity and sovereignty of Yahweh (cf. Ps 79:5-6; Ezek 38:19-23), or they have taken his land in their possession (cf. Ezek 36:5), or they have committed sins (cf. Zeph 1:18), or their actions are corrupt and they do not call on the name of the Lord (cf. Zeph 3:7-9). The 'jealousy' of Yahweh is also directed against his own people (cf. Zech 8:2-3; I Kg 14:22) because they too have committed sins by worshipping other deities.

There are five texts in the Old Testament where this adjective of being jealous is used attributively to Yahweh as 'jealous God' - *'ēlqannā'* (cf. Ex 20:5; 34:14; Deut 4:24; 5:9; 6:15). All the five texts have the same covenantal context in which Yahweh forbids the people of Israel from worshipping other gods and going after idol worship. Now this idol worship was something which Yahweh could never bear because such a behaviour by the people of Israel reflected their infidelity to the covenant.

Thus we can conclude that the God of the Old Testament is a 'jealous' God and this jealousy is also presented as a strong emotional force. However, in all the instances where Yahweh is spoken of as a

jealous God, whether against those who do evil or in support of the ones who remain faithful to him, what stands out is the passionate concern for justice and the demand for fidelity to the covenant. Such jealousy “issues in a desire to attack the aggressor and to defend the person who is the victim of aggression.”⁹

The New Testament also uses the term ‘jealous’ (*zealos* and its cognates in Greek) in the sense of being ‘zealous.’ It is not used to refer to any strong emotion in God, however in Jn 2:17 we identify Jesus’ zeal for the house of God. In all the other places this term denotes either the zeal for the law (of Paul in Phil 3:6; Gal 1:14; Acts 22:3 and of the Jews in Acts 21:20), or the zeal of the Christians for God (cf. Rom 10:2; 2 Cor 9:2) and their eagerness for doing good (cf. 1 Pet 3:13; Tit 2:14) or the eagerness with which the Christians should seek to grow in virtues and gifts of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:31; 14:1; 12:39). Paul calls such a zeal which he has for the Gospel as ‘divine jealousy’ (2 Cor 11:2).

Wrathful God?

Both the Testaments of the Bible testify to the fact of the wrath of God. This wrath of God is expressed through vivid images like burning flame, devouring fire, thick rising smoke, tongue like a devouring fire and a hand striking with a rod (Isa 30:27-33). Deut 29:28 contains one of the texts which express the wrath of god in a comprehensive and concise manner and it expresses the wrath of God in three terms, namely, anger, fury and great wrath. These three terms occur again in Jer 21:5 and in Jer 32:37. Deut 29:28 speaks of the Lord uprooting the people from the land originally given to them and casting them into another country as a concretization of the punishment due to infidelity to the covenant already mentioned in Deut 28. However the final statement on this punishment is made later in Deut 30:3 which announces the Lord’s pity expressed in the reversal of this punishment which becomes tangible in the ‘gathering’ of the same people from the scattered places, provided they repent and return to him. In the same way the announcement of an exile made in Jer 21:5 is reversed in the

⁹ McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 415.

announcement of a return from exile (cf. Jer 30-34). Thus the context of these two texts which speak of the wrath of God make it clear, that this wrath is aimed at chastising an unfaithful people so that they repent and return to the Lord.

Am 4:6-11 contains a long list of different possible expressions of God's wrath such as providing lack of bread, withholding rain, striking with blight and mildew, laying waste the gardens and vineyards, allowing locusts eat up the trees, sending pestilence, killing with sword, carrying away horses, making stench of the camps go into the nostrils and snatching them with fire. The same text also clarifies that the Lord does all this in the expectation that the people would return to him. Thus the primary purpose of the wrath of God is the chastisement of his own people and it is revealed "as part of a larger plan of mercy; and so it is not a fatal spectre to paralyze man, but a call for him to be converted to God's love (Jer 4:4)."¹⁰ It is also remarkable to note that God directs his wrath also against those who abuse widow or orphan (cf. Ex 22:22-24), because such an abuse amounts to breaking the fidelity to the covenant.¹¹

Secondly, we find in the Old Testament the wrath of God directed towards the nations (cf. Ex 15:7; Ps 2:1-9; Amos 1:2-2:16). In Ex 15:7 the wrath of God has been directed against the Egyptians to overthrow them, particularly Pharaoh and his army. By doing so he has "magnified his highness by his defeat of those who have risen up against him."¹² In Ps 2 the first three verses describe the rebellion of the nations and the kings of the earth and the next six verses (vv 4-9) depict God's reaction in fury. And the final verses (vv 10-11) attempt a reconciliation by inviting the nations to serve the Lord. This is a royal,

¹⁰ Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (London: Burns & Oates, 1988), 684.

¹¹ Cf. Anna Norrbak, *The Fatherless and the Widow in the Deuteronomic Covenant* (Abo Akademi University Press, 2001). In this she demonstrates that the duty to care for the *trias* of the Old Testament is not an additional duty but it is part of the covenantal obligation.

¹² John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary 3 (Texas: Word Books, 1987), 206.

more specifically a coronation Psalm sung at the coronation of a Davidic king who believed that power and authority was received from God and exercised under his dominion. By protesting against a Davidic king the nations are actually questioning God's authority.¹³ Amos 1:2-2:16 contains eight oracles of doom against nations and each nation is accused of seven transgressions each (indicated by the recurring phrase 'the three .. and four'). Though Amos narrates only one transgression each still the number seven points to the fullness of transgressions and now the judgement has to fall.¹⁴ It becomes clear from these three texts that the nations become the object of the wrath of God when they protest against him.

In this connection one should also consider those passages in the Old Testament where the nations or the outsiders are also included. Already in the promise given to Abraham it is said that in him "*all the families of the earth* shall be blessed" (cf. Gen 12:3) and it obviously includes the nations as recipients of God's blessings. Commenting on this blessing to Abraham and to other Patriarchs, Rui de Menezes concludes that this blessings to the Patriarchs were also understood as "a blessing for all the clans and nations of the world."¹⁵ In Ex 8:8; 12:25,28; 9:28; 10:17-18, Yahweh listens to the request of Pharaoh made through Moses. The eschatological gathering of the nations at the 'great pilgrimage'¹⁶ spoken of towards the end of the Book of Isaiah (cf. Is 66:18-21) and the universal showering of the spirit of God on all humankind (cf. Joel 3:1-2) show the universal direction of God's mercy. Again the 'ten men' in Zech 8:23 represent 'all men other than Israel' and as in Is 66:18 here too the totality of non-Israelite world is implied by the phrase 'nations of every language'. Thus Zech 8:23

¹³ Cf. Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary 19 (Texas: Word Books, 1983), 65-66.

¹⁴ Cf. Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 206-208.

¹⁵ Rui de Menezes, *The Global Vision of the Hebrew Bible* (Bombay: St. Pauls, 2010), 54.

¹⁶ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, Word Biblical Commentary 25 (Texas: Word Books, 1987), 357-358.

denotes an ever-broadening circle of people are accounted for as part of Yahweh's redemptive scheme.¹⁷ Here one could also call to mind the roles played by Balaam and Cyrus in the history of salvation.

Thirdly, we find texts in the Old Testament that the Lord is capable of and does retain his wrath. We read in Ex 32:9-14 that after intending to destroy the people with his wrath as a response to their worship of the golden calf, the Lord changes his mind and refrained from executing his plan (cf. Ex 32:14). And as we read in Ex 34:6-16 the Lord goes on to reveal his compassionate nature and to promise to work wonders among the people by chasing out and destroying all their enemies. The Lord was ready to spare the people of Sodom and Gomorrah if he would find at least ten righteous there (cf. Gen 18:32) and he actually changed his mind when he saw the Ninevites return from their wicked ways (cf. Jona 3:10). The Book of Judges narrates a continuous story of God getting angry with his disobedient people and transforming his anger into mercy which impels him to send Judges to deliver the same people from the hands of their enemies (cf. Judg 2:11-12; 10:16). That the anger and wrath of God against his people is only partial and temporal can also be found in Is 54:7-8,10; Hos 11:5-9; and Mic 7:18-19.

The Old Testament also speaks of a final wrath that is going to come. 2 Mac 6:12-17 admonishes its readers to accept the present punishments which are meant for disciplining themselves so that they may not be punished at a later point of time when their sins would have reached their height. Such a later wrath finds mentioning also in Dan 8:19; 11:36 and in Zeph 1:15-18; 2:2-3. This 'wrath to come' can on the one hand refer to the judgement that has been spoken in and through the person of Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 3:7) and the 'salvation' (cf. 1 Thess 5:9) brought by him. As the Epistle to the Romans explains we are saved from the wrath through the justification received through Jesus (cf. Rom 5:9) who removed the sin of the world (cf. Jn 1:29) by becoming 'sin' (2 Cor 5:21) and 'cursed' (cf. 3:13). On the other hand this 'wrath

¹⁷ Cf. Carol L. Meyers, Eric M Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 441.

to come' can refer to the day of the final judgement announced by 1 Thess 4:15-17; 1 Cor 15:51-52 and Mt 24:30-31. This idea of 'coming wrath' plays an important role in the preaching of John the Baptist (cf. Mt 3:7; Lk 3:7: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?").

When we turn our attention to the New Testament, we encounter Jesus who gets angry at the hardness of the heart of the Pharisees (Mk 3:1-6). This is a "holy anger" which is already prefigured by Moses who became angry at the lack of faith of the Israelites (cf. Ex 16:20) and by Elijah (cf. 1 Kg 18:40) who killed the false prophets. Besides here and in Jn 2:17 where Jesus gets angry with those who were doing business in the temple, wrath or anger is not related him. On the contrary, as we have seen in the previous paragraph, Jesus is the one who came to save us from the final wrath.

In the Pauline Corpus the wrath of God is most fully explicated in the Epistle to the Romans in which it is said to be directed against human wickedness (Rom 1:18; 2:5-8).¹⁸ The whole section of Rom 1:18-3:20 demonstrates the general guilt of humankind which makes the revelation of the righteousness of God necessary. The Gentiles have sinned because they have failed to recognize God in creation (1:18-23) and the Jews have sinned by not following the law (2:17-23). Thus all are in a situation of sin which is actually ungodliness and wickedness (1:18). More specifically the section Rom 1:18-32 speaks about the revelation of the God's wrath as a judgement against such wickedness of the human beings.

The 'wrath of God' refers neither to a mere emotion or affectivity of God nor to the retributive understanding of reward-punishment but to the last judgement that is already inaugurated in the present. As we have just seen above, the OT speaks of this 'day of wrath' as a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness (Zeph 1:15). In Rom 2:5 and in 1 Thess 1:10; 5:19 Paul also speaks of this 'coming wrath.'

¹⁸ Cf. G. L. Borchert, "Wrath, Destruction," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid (Illinois: IVP, 1993), 991.

C. H. Dodd holds that according to Paul, wrath of God is an inevitable result, or consequence of human sin in a moral universe and not an activity of God against sinners.¹⁹ The wrath or judgement of the Lord has already begun is expressed in 1 Thess 2:16. The fact that God has already given the Gentiles up to their own desires (Rom 1:24); up to degrading passions (Rom 1:26-27); and up to debased mind and things that should not be done (Rom 1:28b-32) could already be seen as punishment for human wickedness.

Yet after reading about the wrath of God in Rom 1:18; 2:5-8 and in 3:5 one would expect from 3:21 onwards a concrete expression of the wrath of God. But what follows from Rom 3:21 is the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ. It means that God is expressing his wrath in the form of an offer to human beings through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that whoever is prepared to participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ by faith. In other words, instead of wrath what is actually effected is a gratuitous grace of God which can be appropriated by every human being through faith.

Thus 'wrath of God' in the Bible should not be considered as an attribute to God but should be viewed as an expression of his will against the sinful humanity. This also makes us aware that there is a fundamental incompatibility between sin and holiness of God. "To wish to reduce the mystery of divine wrath to a mythical expression of human experience is to mistake the seriousness of sin and to forget the tragic side of God's love."²⁰

Revenge-Taking God?

Normally we understand by revenge 'a reaction of an affected party, individual or group, which is aimed at damaging the one who was the cause of the suffered injustice'. Such a reaction can be instinctive and it can also be unbridled and disproportionate and such reactions are traditionally considered to be unlawful and illegal. When we analyze the biblical language of 'vengeance' it is different from its normal

¹⁹ Cf. C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Row, 1932), 21-224.

²⁰ Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary*, 683.

linguistic usages. Biblically it indicates an intervention from an authority responsible for protecting and upholding law and order by justly and proportionately punishing the offender and preventing him from continuing his unjust behavior.²¹ That is why the words 'judge' and 'justice' occur along with revenge in many places (cf. 1 Sam 24:12; Jer 11:20; Ps 58:10-11; 94:1-2) thereby indicating a close connection between avenging and restoring and re-establishing the initial harmonious and peaceful situation.

Both the Old and the New Testaments report of this vengeance of God. Though the Old Testament has more instances which speak of God taking vengeance, still one cannot separate the New from the Old because they belong together. In the Bible, it is almost always God who is the subject who takes vengeance and at such moments he acts out of his royal authority either to establish justice among his people Israel (cf. Lev 26:25; Is 1:24; 59:17) or to liberate his people from the hands of their enemies (cf. Deut 32:35, 41:43; Is 34:8; 47:3; 63:4; Jer 50-51, Ezek 25; Mic 5:14) by depriving the enemies of their power (cf. Jer 5:9, 29; 9:8; Ezek 24:8). Such a language of God taking revenge makes sense only if one accepts the faith-perspective that the world and life in this world is guided by God. The purpose of God's vengeance is to rescue those who have a fearful heart (cf. Is 35:4) and to comfort the mourning (cf. Is 61:2). This vengeance of God is closely linked not only to his anger but also to his compassion and to his readiness to forgive (cf. Ps 99:8; Nah 1:2-3). Thus what we said earlier about the wrath of God is applicable also to God's vengeance, namely, it is not an attribute to God but merely signifies the way God functions.

We read in Rom 12:19: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" It is striking that this verse makes a direct connection between 'wrath of God' and 'vengeance' and forbids human beings from taking revenge. This ban on revenge is already made in Deut 32:35 and in Lev 19:17-18 and is again repeated in

²¹ This description is taken from an article in German by Erick Zenger. Cf. Erich Zenger, "Rache: Biblisch-Theologisch," *Lexikon Für Theologie Und Kirche VIII* (Freiburg: Herder, 1999), 791.

Heb 10:30. By quoting this in Rom 12:19, Paul intends to “emphasize the biblical position that vengeance is God’s portion and not an option for an individual to exercise.”²² The taking of revenge is already denounced in the Old Testament (cf. Lev 19:18; Prov 20:22; 24:29; Sir 28:1-7) and here Paul is redefining the boundaries of the people of God as resulting in a greater openness and wider application of this principle.²³ Besides issuing such a ban on practicing vengeance, Lev 19:17-18 goes a step further and invites human beings to overcome evil with good. This whole concept of abstaining from vengeance and taking efforts to overcome evil with good is brought to its fulfilment by Jesus in Mt 5:43-48 where he calls for the love of enemies.

Thus God does not take revenge on anyone unjustly or disproportionately out of his own whims and fancies but only to reestablish the original system of equality, justice and faithfulness.

A God Who Kills?

There are a number of texts in the Old Testament which narrate the story of killing and expelling pagan population at the command of Yahweh (cf. Deut 7:1-26; 9:3; Josh 6:21; 8:1-29; 1 Sam 15). One can also add the imprecatory Psalms such as Pss 58; 83; 109 to this list.²⁴ These Psalms and a few verses from many other Psalms are called imprecatory because they call for punishment or judgment of Yahweh upon the enemies and curse them. It is not possible for us to study all these texts in this essay. However, we shall take up Deut 7:1-26 which I think could be considered a key text on this theme.

The whole chapter Deut 7 addresses the issue of conquest of the land by the Israelites and the struggles they faced with the Canaanites and their culture while conquering them. Though names of seven nations occur at the beginning of this chapter, the main concern of the

²² Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 24:10-34:12*, Word Biblical Commentary 6B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), 821.

²³ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 38B (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 750.

²⁴ To read more about these imprecatory Psalms of the Old Testament kindly read, Erich Zenger, “Fluchpsalmen,” *Lexikon Für Theologie Und Kirche III* (Freiburg: Herder, 1995), 1335-36.

capital is to ban the Canaanites which is expressed in words like 'destroy' (v 2), 'devour' (v 16), 'clear away' and 'make a quick end' (v 22), and 'blot out' (v 24). They should be destroyed because otherwise they would turn away the people of Israel and their children from following Yahweh (vv 4, 16, 25, cf. Ex 23:33; Deut 20:17-18; Num 33:55). In reality the Canaanites were neither expelled nor exterminated as may be learned from Judg 1:12-33 and 1 Kg 9:20-21.²⁵ Further it must be said that the relationship between Israel and Canaan was also reciprocal in certain sense. As L. Legrand concludes, "Canaan stands, on the one hand, for what Israel *rejected*, but, on the other hand, for the milieu that *nurtured* its growth."²⁶

When we take a closer look at the text we realize that the whole chapter is one way of explaining how the people of Israel came to take possession of the Promised Land. In a story of a people in making at its fledgling stage such radical ban and prohibitions are necessary so that the people remain 'holy' and faithful to God alone. The Lord has chosen them to remain faithful to him by becoming a 'contrast community' in comparison with the other neighbouring communities where slavery and idol-worship coupled with temple prostitution were being practiced. The motivation behind the election of the people of Israel by God is also spelt out clearly in vv 7-8, namely, he chose them because they were the fewest of all the people and he loved them and remained faithful to the oath he made to their forefathers.

We have to make another important observation to understand God's punishment properly. It is said in v 26 that if any of the Israelites would bring an image or gold or silver from the idol worship that would be an abhorrent thing to God and the one who brings such a thing would be set apart for destruction just like the Canaanites are also set apart. This again elucidates the danger of falling prey to idol worship as the reason as to why the Canaanites must be annihilated. And in this there is no distinction between an Israelite and a Canaanite. In fact, there is

²⁵ Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 384.

²⁶ Lucien Legrand, *The Bible On Culture: Belonging or Dissenting?* (Bangalore: TPI, 2008), 15.

the story of Achan in Jos 7:1-25 who is punished for having taken some of the devoted things. Whoever takes to idol worship and forgets and neglects real God must be destroyed.

The death of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11 also contains a story of a radical punishment for not so grave a sin at the beginning stages of a new people of God, the Early Church. Their behaviour of putting aside some of the money they had received for their property is presented here in sharp contrast to what Barnabas has done (cf. Acts 4.36-37). "The external danger to which the Church by the hostility of the rulers had only the effect of increasing its boldness and confidence in Christ; but now an internal danger arises much more to be dreaded."²⁷

Sovereign God

We have seen above that the reason as to why God's wrath burned against the nations and the Israelites was that they failed to pay the due respect to him. This was part of the process of the people of Israel developing a 'monotheistic' belief. Ex 5:3 speaks of the God of the Hebrews and it is he who gives them their identity as one people. He forbids them strictly from turning to other gods (cf. Ex 20:2-3) because he is a jealous God (cf. Ex 34:12-16) and anyone sacrificing to other gods will be put to death (cf. Ex 22:20). Yahweh-Baal polemic is also strongly present in the Bible (cf. 1 Kg 18-19; 2 Kg 1; 10; Hos 9:10; 11.1-2; 13:1). Later this belief in one God became a systematic teaching as we find in Deut 6:4-5 (cf. Deut 4:35-39).

In the New Testament Jesus is presented as the only Son of the one Father. The prayer 'Our Father' calls for hallowing the name of the one God and praying of the coming of his reign. Acts 4:12 makes it very clear that no other name besides the name of Jesus has been given through which one could be saved. The one God and one Saviour theology is proposed by Paul in 1 Cor 8:6 and this Jesus, the Lord, to the glory of the Father (cf. Phil 2:11). The Early Christian mission consisted in turning people to God from idols and to enable them to serve the living God (1 Thess 1:9-10), that is, they have to confess that

²⁷ Paton J. Gloag, *A Critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburg: T. And T. Clark, 1870), 169-70.

Jesus is the Lord who has been raised from the dead by his Father (cf. Rom 10:9).

Thus it becomes vivid that the God of the Bible is a supreme, sovereign God and besides him there is no one else. Though the Bible presents him as the God of the people of Israel in the Old Testament and as the Father of Jesus Christ in the New, still this God is presented as the one universal Father of all humankind. This is the purpose of the Christian mission that all humans are made Disciples of Christ and there is only one sheep under one shepherd. This universal aspect of God is already present in the Old Testament. According to Rui de Menezes, the Priestly author who was the final redactor of the Pentateuch, by avoiding the divine tetragram YHWH in the primeval history, transfers the perspective from a defensive, reactionary and exclusivist level to a higher universal level and presents "One Creator God who is concerned with the salvation of the One Humanity, whose task is to conserve and preserve the One Universe. He replaces the Deuteronomist's trilogy 'One God, One People, one Cult' with his new trilogy, 'One God, One Humanity, One Cosmos'!"²⁸

Conclusion

There is a tendency to see the Bible as super-cultural, that is, it stands above all cultures. For example Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger holds such a principle and believes that anyone who wants to stick to the Bible is thrust into a cultural no-man's land.²⁹ Throughout his book on 'Truth and Tolerance' he holds on to the view that the Christian revelation with its fundamental tenets Trinity and Incarnation is something that comes from outside³⁰ and therefore should be accepted by everyone who wants to be saved. It is not to be refuted that the biblical revelation is made 'from above' and it speaks of the real, sovereign God but one should never forget the process of the formation of the different sections of the Bible. As the Bible is considered the 'Word of God in the words of men' one must also allow for creative influence of the cultural contexts and the individual and collective talents. Otherwise, an

²⁸ Rui de Menezes, *The Global Vision*, 38.

²⁹ Cf. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 122.

³⁰ Ratzinger, *Truth*, 89.

exclusivist understanding of the Bible and its language would make its believers violently and terribly intolerant towards people of other beliefs. An undifferentiated, literalist, extra-contextual reading of the Bible is always to be avoided.

As we have seen throughout this essay, a contextual, differentiated reading of the Bible, enables us to understand the tolerance or the intolerance of the biblical God in proper perspective. As was indirectly indicated one cannot make any distinction whatsoever between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament, because both speak about the same God. The difference in the languages used in both the Testaments has to be explained in relation to the respective cultural milieu. Thus, the facts of the God of the Bible as a 'jealous,' 'wrathful,' 'revenge-taking,' 'killing,' and 'sovereign' God is found both in the Old as well as in the New Testament. These facts do create an impression in the readers' mind that such a God is an intolerant God. In any case the 'intolerance' that is attributed to the God of the Bible is not the same as what we understand by 'religious intolerance' in the modern times. The God of the Bible is intolerant only occasionally, either with his own people who do not remain faithful to the commitment already made or with outsiders who themselves have become intolerant towards the rest. And this intolerance of the biblical God is aimed at either reestablishing the lost relationships or at reestablishing the lost justice through offences committed by the arrogant.

Thus the God of the Bible is interested only in establishing the reign of love. All that is un-love and all that promotes selfishness and exploitation of fellow humans and nature was never tolerated by him. His jealousy, wrath, vengeance, violence and universal claims, all these have to be understood in the context of his ongoing efforts to establish authentic love among human beings and in the whole universe. Until then this God of the Bible will remain restless and will find ways and persons who would collaborate with him in this great mission of leading all things to perfection.

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Tolerance and Intolerance in the Church

Isaac Padinjarekuttu

Paul could boldly proclaim, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave^z nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”(Gal 3:28). The deep experience of Christ was the source of the Church’s attitude of tolerance towards others and their religious faith and political ideologies. However, both the Jewish and the Roman authorities were intolerant to the believers in Jesus Christ. Thus the Church began as a persecuted, minority group in the Roman Empire. Christians were hunted down like criminals and were accused of all sorts of misdeeds, often without any basis. However, when Christianity was proclaimed as the state religion of the Roman Empire, the persecuted Church became persecuting Church! From the time of Constantine till Vatican II, the Church failed to be model of tolerance. The author attempts to show from the history of the Church that there were many instances of intolerance in the Church’s dealings with her own members as well as the people of other religions and ideologies.

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Introduction

“I condemn Christianity, and confront it with the most terrible accusation that an accuser has ever had in his mouth. To my mind it is the greatest of all conceivable corruptions...It converted every value into its opposite, every truth into a lie and every honest impulse into an ignominy of the soul...I call Christianity the one great curse, the one enormous and innermost perversion, the one great instinct of revenge,

for which no means are too venomous, too underhand, too underground and too petty – I call it the one immoral blemish of mankind.” This hate-filled curse on Christianity is the conclusion to *The Antichrist*, the last work which Friedrich Nietzsche personally wrote for publication, aimed directly at the annihilation of Christianity.¹ Almost the same sentences adorn the work of another German writer, Karlheinz Deschner, who published a ten-volume *Kriminalgeschichte des Christentums*² (Criminal History of Christianity). Similar criticism of the Church has emanated from the pens of hundreds of authors all over the world. While there is considerable justification for a criticism of the Church system, there is no justification for sweeping condemnations which are unable to make critical distinctions. Both, written in bright colours and stained-glass window piety and those which are aggressively polemical and cynically condescending, are half-truths and half-truths are at the same half-errors. One of the criticisms levelled against the Church is that it is intolerant. This is what we want to examine in this article and I shall limit myself to the Catholic Church. Setting aside polemic, there has been and there still is a lot of intolerance in the Church and it lies at the bottom of the criticism by its adversaries. Measured against the Gospel, the Church’s attitude and actions often seen un-Christian.

Tolerance in the Early Church

The dictionary defines tolerance as the ability or willingness to allow the existence of opinions or behaviour that one dislikes or disagrees with and its broad synonyms are: forbearance, liberality, open-mindedness, lack of prejudice, lack of bias, broad-mindedness, etc. And intolerance is defined as unwillingness to accept views, beliefs, or behaviour that differ from one’s own and its broad synonyms are: bigotry, narrow-mindedness, small-mindedness, parochialism, provincialism, insularity, fanaticism, dogmatism, illiberality, prejudice, bias, and so on.

¹ Hans Kueng, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future*, New York: Continuum, 1995, 5.

² Karlheinz Deschner, *Kriminalgeschichte des Christentums*, 10 vol., Reinbeck: Rowohlt, 1986-2013.

One does not need much exegetical acumen to see that Jesus was tolerant in all the above senses. But he was not tolerant in the sense of “compromising one’s convictions”, “yielding ground upon important issues”, both, “modern” signs of tolerance. He was also intolerant in certain areas, but not in the sense of the above definition. He was intolerant towards hypocrisy: “Do not be like the hypocrites”, he warned (Mt 6:16). He was intolerant towards selfishness. In Mt 19:21 he tells the young man to sell all his possessions, give it to the poor and then to follow him. He was intolerant towards sin. He told the woman caught in adultery: “Do not sin again” (Jn 8:11) and to the paralytic: “Do not sin again, or something worse may happen to you” (Jn 5:14). But this is not the kind of intolerance that we find in the Church. The early Church followed the tolerant attitude of Jesus, her Lord and Master in relating with others including those who opposed her and even persecuted her.

The Church took shape as an ideal community where the believers were of “one heart and one soul” and there was no one in need (Acts 4:32f). The early Christians bore witness to the risen Lord by their love for one another. In the beginning the Jewish Christian community believed that Jesus Christ was their monopoly and it was not willing to accept the Greeks into their community. But in the course of time they realized that Christ was for all. The initial intolerance of the Judaizers towards the Gentiles was overcome by the Council of Jerusalem. So Paul could boldly proclaim, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave⁷ nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). The deep experience of Christ was the source of her tolerance of others and their religious faith and political ideologies.

The Church began as a persecuted, minority group in the Roman Empire. Christians were hunted down like criminals and were accused of all sorts of misdeeds, often without any basis. So it was right to protest against it and the early apologists did a splendid job of it. One need only to read the arguments of Tertullian in his famous *Apologeticum* written in 197 in which he denounces the intolerance and cruelty of the Roman state, dumping it as unjust, and demands freedom of religion. Tertullian ended his work with a challenge: “Nothing whatever is accomplished by your cruelties, each one more exquisite

than the last. It is the bait which wins men for our school. We multiply whenever we are mown down by you; the blood of martyrs is seed.”³ But the persecution of Christians continued, until Constantine promulgated the Edict of Milan in 313, granting unlimited freedom of religion to the whole empire.

Power and Intolerance

How short the memory of the Church can be! It took less than a century for the persecuted Church to become a persecuting Church. As the Church became the state religion and the state power was used against heretics, Jews and pagans, particularly under Theodosius the Great (379-395). On 27 February 380, Theodosius issued the decree *Cunctos populos*, the so-called “Edict of Thessalonica” which declared the Nicene Creed to be the only legitimate religion and the only one entitled to call itself Catholic. “The rest, however, whom we adjudge demented and insane, shall sustain the infamy of heretical dogmas, their meeting places shall not receive the name of Churches...”⁴ In 393 he decreed the general prohibition, never to be revoked, of all pagan cults and sacrificial rites, threatening those who acted to the contrary with punishment: “This is a complete outrage against religion, shall be punished by the forfeiture of that house or landholding in which it is proved that he served a pagan superstition.”⁵ The banning of the Olympics (resumed only in 1896) which he denounced as pagan was part of this legislation.

Theodosius had also executed the Spanish bishop and ascetic preacher Priscillian with six companions in 385. It was the first execution for heresy. For the first time, Christians killed other Christians over a difference in faith. The Church began to go along with all the compulsory state measures against heretical Christians and non-Christians. Establishment of the Christian Church as an imperial Church was also a hard blow to Judaism which had survived the two catastrophes of

³Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. II, Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics Inc., 1986, 260.

⁴Jean Comby, *How to Read Church History*, vol. I, New York: Crossroad, 1995, 73.

⁵*Ibid.*

the years 70 and 135 (the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem) and existed dispersed over the Roman Empire. Several Church Fathers fanned the flame of this ecclesiastical anti-Judaism, particularly branding them as murderers of Jesus. The bugle was sounded by Melito of Sardes: "Hear, all you families of mankind and see the strange murder that has been committed in the midst of Jerusalem. God has been murdered, the King of Israel has been slain by Israelitish hand."⁶ Various repressive measures were implemented to isolate the Jews socially. And the rest of the history of antisemitism is best not described, which the Church, finally, "deplored" during the Second Vatican Council. "Remembering, then, her common heritage with the Jews and moved not by any political consideration, but solely by the religious motivation of Christian charity, she deplores all hatred, persecutions, and displays of anti-Semitism levelled at any time or from any source against the Jews" (*Nostra Aetate* 4).

Augustine of Hippo encountered the rivalry and opposition from the Donatists who had created a schism in the African Church. First he tried persuasion and sweetness to convince his adversaries. Gradually, worn down by the violence of the Donatists, he moved from persuasion to "good coercion" and finally to repression: "There is a persecution of unrighteousness, which the impious inflict upon the Church of Christ; and there is a righteous persecution, which the Church of Christ inflicts upon the impious."⁷ This "just war theory" was the foundation of much of the violence committed by the Church in subsequent centuries.

The conciliar decisions of the early Church also plunged Christianity unto undreamed-of-theological confusions with constant entanglements in Church politics. They produced splits and sparked off a persecution of heretics unique in the history of religion. In the name of Jesus Christ, the preacher of non-violence and peace, those of other beliefs were persecuted and indeed executed. Cultural objects beyond price and art treasures were destroyed. The best example of it was the Eastern Schism of 1054. The language used by the legate of the Pope, Cardinal Humbert da Silva Candida, against Michael Cerularius, the Patriarch

⁶ "Homily on the Passion," No. 94.

⁷ "Letter 185," 11, 24.

of Constantinople in the Sentence of Excommunication was anything but Christian: "May Michael the neophyte, who improperly bears the title of patriarch and those who follow him in the above-mentioned errors, may they all fall under the anathema, *Maranatha*, with the Simonians and all the heretics, indeed with the devil and his angels, unless they return to their senses....Amen, Amen."⁸ With no knowledge of Greek, he thought, "*Maranatha*" meant a curse!

With the separation of East and West, there begins another phase of intolerance with the rise of the Western Church under the papacy. The initiator of this was Pope Gregory VII with his Gregorian Reforms. In his *Dictatus Papae* (1075) Gregory decreed that the Roman Pontiff has unlimited and absolute power; he is the unqualified lord of the Church and the supreme lord of the world, a claim which reached its ridiculous height with Pope Boniface VIII. In his Bull *Unam Sanctam* (1302) he said: "We declare, state, define and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human being to be subject to the Roman Pontiff." Gregory laid the foundation for medieval Christendom. On the one hand it saved the Church from uncontrolled lay domination, but on the other, it gave rise to a series of repressive measures against anyone who did not toe the line of the Church, which meant, the Pope. The highly centralized, legalistic, politicized, militarized and clericalized medieval Christendom was the result of the Gregorian Reforms.

Christendom was a Christian society, where other religions were hardly tolerated. Canon 68 of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) said that the Jews "shall not appear in public at all on the days of lamentation and on passion Sunday."⁹ Pope Clement V (1305-14) decreed that the presence of Muslims in Europe was an insult to the creator. The militarization of the Church resulted in the crusades with many episodes of bloodbath of Jews and Muslims which leave a bitter memory in the minds of the Muslims till today and are hugely responsible for the catastrophically strained relation between Christians and Muslims today.

⁸ Comby, vol. I, 133.

⁹ Norman Tanner, *Decrees of The Ecumenical Councils*, vol. I, Sheed & Ward, London and Georgetown University Press, Washington DC, 1990, 266.

But Christendom did not remain unchallenged. The medieval religious dissidents like the Poor Men of Lyons, the Cathars, and many other groups, lumped together under the category of heretics were evangelicals who protested against a Church which had become too rich and authoritarian. The response of the Church was increasing repression of the so-called heretics. One can recall the Albigensian Crusade proclaimed by Innocent III in 1208. Albi was at the centre of an area where there were numerous heretics. The most infamous episode of this crusade is the massacre in 1209 of the people of Beziers who had taken refuge in their cathedral. But the high point of the fight against heresy was the setting up of the Inquisition, what was to fill many of the darkest pages of Church history, mocking not only the gospel but also the most basic principles of justice. It is hard to explain how the Church, in the name of the Gospel could burn alive those who did not accept its teaching. Theological justification for it came from none other than Thomas Aquinas.¹⁰ That the Church was not wont to tolerate intellectual challenges showed itself in its reaction to persons like William of Ockham (1290-1350), the English Franciscan and philosopher, John Wyclif (1324-1384), the Oxford theologian, and John Hus (1369-1415), the Prag theologian and preacher. The last was burned at the stake at the order of the Council of Constance which reneged on its promise of safe passage and a fair hearing. The last words of John Hus were: "God is my witness that I have never taught nor preached what is attributed to me on the testimony of false witnesses. My prime intention in my preaching and all my actions has been to extricate men from sin. I am ready to die with joy in the truth of the gospel, which I have written, taught and preached in accordance with the tradition of the holy fathers."¹¹ The Dominican preacher Girolamo Savorarola was burned at the stake in 1498 in Florence for attacking the abuses of the papacy of Alexander VI, the most licentious Pope in history.

After the Reformation, there followed another great watershed of modern history, the Enlightenment. The revolutions it unleashed in science, philosophy, theology, culture, state, society, technology and

¹⁰ *Summa Theologica*, IIa, IIae, 11, art. 3, quoted in Comby, vol. I, 169.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 184.

industry, shook the very foundations of the Church, the Bible, Catholic doctrine, and papal authority. The most potent symbol of these revolutions was the French Revolution, for modern democracy and human rights a milestone, but for the Church, one of the gravest threats to its existence. The “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen” of 26 August 1789 is the charter of modern democracy and human rights, but Pope Pius VI condemned it in the brief *Quod aliquantum* of 10 March 1791: “This absolute liberty which not only assures people of the right not to be disturbed about their religious opinions but also gives them this licence to think, write and even have printed with impunity all that the most unruly imagination can suggest about religion, it is a monstrous right... What could be more senseless than to establish among men equality and this unbridled freedom which seems to quench reason...?”¹² Similarly, when the Industrial Revolution’s shadow side, the wretched state of the proletariat was pointed out by the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) of Marx and Engels, there began the perennial tension between the Church and Communism which lasts till today. The Church was not willing to accept even the most moderate of modern ideas, an unwillingness which continued through the whole of the 19th century till the eve of the Second Vatican Council.

The first stage was the suppression of Catholic liberalism, represented by persons like Felicite Lamennais (1782-1854), Henri Lacordaire (1802-1861), Charles Rene Montalembert (1810-1870) etc. who called for a renewal of Church and society based on freedom of conscience, freedom of the press, freedom of association, decentralization, separation of the Church from state etc. The Church’s answer came from Pope Gregory XVI, unreservedly numbered among the enemies of freedom in the 19th century, through his encyclical letter, *Mirari Vos*, in 1832 where he condemned all liberal ideas. He called it a “false and absurd maxim, or better madness, that everyone should have and practise freedom of conscience.” Freedom of the press was denounced as a “loathsome freedom which one cannot despise too strongly and from which to expect anything good will be an illusion.” In 1834 he

¹²Jean Comby and Diarmaid MacCulloh, *How to Read Church History*, vol. II, New York: Crossroad, 1995, 113.

published another encyclical, *Singulari Nos*, in which he condemned Lamennais and Montalembert.

Then came Pius IX (1846-1878), number one enemy of all revolutions and any liberalism. All liberal theologians and faculties were censured throughout Europe, persons like George Hermes, Anton Güther, Ignaz von Döllinger etc. In 1864, he published the *Syllabus Errorum*, a list of 80 modern errors, and the encyclical *Quanta cura* which condemned these errors. Number 79 of the *Syllabus* said: "It is false that civil liberty for all forms of worship and the full power allowed to all to manifest all their thoughts and all their opinions openly and publicly leads people more easily to spiritual and moral corruption and to an extension of the plague of indifferentism."¹³ It was a total condemnation of modernity and modern society, liberal clerical associations, bible societies, human rights, and so on. Most of the influential modern philosophers, scientists, theologians, writers etc. were put on the index. His crowning success was the First Vatican Council of 1869-70 which also defined the two papal dogmas, a perennial burden on ecumenism.

The next phase of repressive intolerance was that of Pope Pius X (1903-1914) who continued the caution with regard to modern ideas, perhaps even more strongly. On the one hand he was responsible for a constructive renovation of the internal life of the Church, but is known today for his opposition to and suppression of Modernism. Modernism was an attempt to reconcile contemporary scientific, historical, psychological and philosophical positions with the Catholic faith (1890-1910) started by a small group of intellectuals, laity, and clergy, whose main problem was the interpretation of Bible and dogma. Two important representatives of the movement were Alfred Loisy (1857-1940) and George Tyrrel, SJ (1861-1909). Loisy, whose "heretical" positions included the assertion that Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch, the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis are not historical and the provocative saying, "Jesus came to announce the kingdom; but what arrived was the Church," was excommunicated and his books were put on the index. Similarly, the English Jesuit George Tyrrell was expelled from the Society of Jesus and was excommunicated.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 135.

In 1907 Pope Pius X published the decree, *Lamentabili* (a list of 65 propositions against Modernism) and the encyclical *Pascendi*, calling Modernism the “meeting place of all heresies”. He condemned all reform-minded theologians, historians, and exegetes, with index, excommunication, dismissal etc. Anti-Modernist Oath was introduced for all clergy and candidates for major orders and for theological degrees, which was lifted only in 1966. The Pope thought that he had restored theological order, but, in effect, he produced an oppressive intellectual atmosphere in the Catholic Church.

Pius XII (1939-1958), the last of the restoration Popes, too, initiated many reforms in the Church, like the liturgical movement, encouraging lay apostolate, encouraging biblical studies (*Divinoafflante Spiritu* of 1943), etc., but in the field of theology he was reactionary. He silenced philosophers and theologians like Teilhard de Chardin, Henri de Lubac, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Yves Congar, Karl Rahner etc. No pluralism in thinking was allowed. The encyclical letter *Humani Generis* of 1950 condemned all “errors” of the time, the movement of the “worker-priests”, the “New Theology” in France, which was historical, biblical and patristic, etc. It showed that the Church was not ready to accept even the most moderate implications of modernity.

Intolerance towards other Christians

The Reformation, largely provoked by the Church, exposed both Catholic and Protestant intolerance. In the wake of the Reformation, Christianity split into a number of different Churches fighting with each other, plunging Europe into religious wars causing indescribable devastation. One of the bloodiest of these episodes took place in France, the so-called Bartholomew Day Massacre, in 1572 during which, according to modern estimates some 5000 to 30,000 French Calvinists, the Huguenots, were massacred by the Catholics in Paris, hearing which Pope Gregory XIII ordered the *Te Deum* to be sung. It “was the worst of the century’s religious massacres” and “printed on Protestant minds the indelible conviction that Catholicism was a bloody and treacherous religion.”

That Catholic-Protestant relations remained strained till the Vatican II is a historical fact and the reason was lack of an open-minded attitude

of the Catholic Church towards other Christians. In the encyclical *Mortalium Animos*, Pope Pius XI proceeded against the growing ecumenism in the following words: "Under the seduction of thought and the charm of words an undoubted error of the worst kind has slipped in, which is capable of ruining the foundations of the Catholic faith from top to bottom." He continued: "The Apostolic See has never allowed Catholics to attend meetings of non-Catholics; the union of Christians can only go forward by encouraging the dissidents to return to the one true Church of Jesus Christ, which they once had the misfortune to abandon."¹⁴ But in spite of the decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II, the Church came out with an unfortunate document of intolerance in 2000, *Dominus Jesus*.

Intolerance towards other Religions

The process of the persecuted Church becoming the persecuting Church was mentioned above. From the beginning, there were objections by the non-Christians to what Christians taught, believed and practised. Celsus, in his book *True Doctrine* written in 170 challenged the Christians: "The assertion that some God or son of God has come down to the earth as judge of mankind is most shameful, and no lengthy argument is required to refute it. What is the purpose of such descent on the part of God? Was it in order to learn what was going on among men? Does not he know everything?"¹⁵ Lucian of Samosata (125-192) painted Christians as naive and credulous people. "The poor wretches have convinced themselves, first and foremost part, that they are going to be immortal and live for all time in consequence of which they despise death and even willingly give themselves into custody, most of them."¹⁶ Porphyry (234-305), in his writing *Against the Christians*, argued that Christian doctrines like incarnation and resurrection are absurd. "Even supposing that some Greeks were stupid enough to think that gods dwell in statues this would be a purer conception than to accept that the divine had descended into the womb of the Virgin Mary, that he had become an

¹⁴ 1928, 6.

¹⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, IV, 2f.,

¹⁶ Lucian, *The Death of Perigrinus*, 13.

embryo, that after his birth he had been wrapped in swaddling clothes, stained with blood, bile and worse...."¹⁷ But Christianity managed to defend itself and overcome all obstacles, in the beginning, through Christian witness and solid intellectual arguments. But as the Christianization of Europe progressed, which was completed by the year 1000, there were also instances of the use of brute force, particularly when political conquest was associated with conversion. Baptism was a pledge of allegiance to the conqueror. For example, for Charlemagne, evangelization was the conclusion of military conquest. So, when the ruler of the Saxons, Widukind, led a revolt in the wake of the conquest by Charlemagne in 778, Charlemagne resorted to terror, the famous Capitulary on Saxony of 778: baptism or death: "Any unbaptized Saxon who seeks to hide among his compatriots and refuses to have baptism administered to him will be put to death."

But the same kind of submissiveness was not to be found among the people outside Europe. When the Franciscan, William of Rubruck, visited the court of the Mongol ruler, Mangu Khan (1253-1255), he was told: "Just as God has given the hand many fingers, so he has given man many ways...God has given you a Testament, and you do not follow us; he has given us soothsayers; we do what they say and we live in peace." With these words he ended the discussion. It was a warning that the world outside had different perspectives about religion and Christianity. But armed with crusading bulls the missionaries set out to the world outside with a variety of motives. The violence of the conquest of Latin America and the sadism of the African slave trade cannot fail to horrify anyone. It was the intolerance towards other cultures and religions that caused the Rites Disputes in India and China and the banning of inculturation in these countries in the 18th century which cost the Church dearly. The words of the Chinese emperor K'ang-Hsi to the papal legate de Tournon proved prophetic: "The Europeans cannot grasp the meaning of our books; so it is to be feared that the Pope may make some ruling which, based on false information, will inevitably lead to the ruin of Christianity in my empire."¹⁸

¹⁷ Comby I, 33.

¹⁸ Jean Comby, *How to Understand Christian Mission*, London, SCM Press, 1996, 110.

The Berlin Conference which met to “arrange for the most favourable conditions for the development of trade and civilization in certain regions of Africa” concluded the Treaty of Berlin (1885) which led to a division of Africa among European powers. It was a charter of missions under the aegis of colonial imperialism. The collusion between imperialism and evangelization was a fact, both sharing the prejudices about the superiority of the white man and the universal value of European civilization and it was considered a providential fact. The same thing happened in China which did not want to allow entry to traders and missionaries. But after several conflicts the Western powers, by the “unfair” treaties of 1842 and after, succeeded in opening up the Chinese ports. The result was a Chinese xenophobia towards Europeans often breaking out in violence. An anti-Christian tract from the year 1885 read: “Accursed be these Europeans, these missionary dogs who come to preach a barbarous religion and destroy the holy wisdom, who profane and defame the holy Confucius, although they have not studied the first page of a book. Heaven can no longer tolerate them and the earth refuses to bear them; let us strike them, and send them to meditate eternally in the depths of hell.”¹⁹

Intolerance towards Women

That Jesus himself relativized the “fathers” and their traditions, also called women to his group of disciples, show that patriarchal hierarchies cannot appeal to him. According to present-day research, there can no longer be any question that women played a considerably more important role, not only among the disciples of Jesus, but also in earliest Christianity, than is directly indicated in the New Testament sources. As Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has shown, in the early Christian movement, there was a praxis of equality and the involvement of all, both male and female disciples.²⁰ How far, however, women were active as charismatic itinerant preachers in the early Church can only be conjectured. Historically this can no more be verified than the thesis that women were decisive for the extension of the Jesus movement to

¹⁹ Comby II, 178.

²⁰ Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, London and New York, 1983, 135.

gentiles. All this, however, does not detract from the important recognition that the activity of Jesus called to life a community of disciples who were equals. That this was the case with the Pauline communities is clear (Gal 3:27ff). The Pauline literature and Acts still allow us to recognize that women were among the most prominent missionaries and leaders in the early Christian movement. They were apostles and missionaries like Paul, and some were his co-workers. They were teachers, preachers, and competitors in the race for the gospel. They founded house Churches and as prominent patrons, used their influence for other missionaries and Christians.²¹ But already in Corinth the first conflicts were brewing over the public preaching of women and may be in other communities, too, and so statements like “women are to keep silence in Church; let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness; I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men” etc. are found in some of his letters. This shows that the baptismal equality which Paul quotes in Galatians was not really put into practice everywhere. There were always forces at work which sought to limit the equal treatment of men and women, also Jews and Greeks, freemen and slaves, This tendency finally gained upperhand, and as time went on, the question of the status of women shows an increasing repression of the original democratic and charismatic structures at the beginning of Christianity, and a process of institutionalization which now ran its course increasingly in favour of men.

In the writings of the Church Fathers, although there were many positive things said about women, there were tendencies hostile to the body which devalued women, and countless bishops and theologians joined them who constantly argued that women are inferior and should be excluded from Church offices. Till today, no full study has been done about the actual role of women in the early Church, the women martyrs, women confessors, women teachers, and women prophets. The reason for this is clear: vertical hierarchies increasingly began to get in the way of the brotherliness and sisterliness which were the stamp of Jesus and the early Christians. Hostility to sex was taken over from ancient tradition and propagated at the expense of women,

²¹ *Ibid.*, 183.

although nothing of the kind can be discerned in the preaching of Jesus, which at most shows a relativization of marriage and family in favour of the kingdom of God.

This continued in the middle ages. Canon Law prescribed that women were subject to men with an argument from natural law. The Church's ideal for women's existence was primarily the nun. Women remained excluded from all Church offices and were repeatedly forbidden to preach because of the attractiveness of the heretics with their positive attitude towards women. The religious orders which came into being in the spirit of Dominic and Francis were finally put under the corresponding male orders. The Beguines who founded an alternative form of living consecration by living in the world were declared heretical and suppressed by the Council of Vienne in 1311. A few exceptions of women involved in Church politics were there, Hildegard of Bingen, Birgitta of Sweden, Catherine of Siena and later Teresa of Avila.

There was indisputable progress of the status of women as a result of the Reformation theology, but the social structure remained utterly patriarchal. Despite all the new possibilities of activity for women, nothing changed in their role of being subordinate to men. The contempt for women was also the cause of the witch-craze which saw the death thousands of women, which, with the exception of the holocaust, is the greatest mass killing of human beings by other human beings in Europe outside war.

Nor did the Enlightenment with all its revolutions bring about any real emancipation of women. Pope Leo XIII who was more open than his predecessors wrote in his encyclical *Immortale Dei* that the man is set over the woman, that women are to be subject to their husbands in chaste and faithful obedience, not for the satisfaction of lust but for the procreation of the human race and for life together in the family.²² In *Rerum Novarum* he said that women should not be given heavy manual labour because the female sex was by nature fitted for home-work and it is that which is best adopted at once to preserve her modesty and to promote the good bringing-up of children and the well-being of

²²I885, No. 20

the family.²³ It was necessary to wait until after the Second World War, indeed, until the 1960s and 1970s for a new discussion to begin throughout society and the Church about equal rights and partnership between men and women. A new generation of women was growing up which said the gospel contained sufficient stimuli to assure women not only of their own worth generally but also that their own rights to co-determination and participation in all spheres of Church and society were no less than those of men.

The Way toward Tolerance

In the first place, the above mentioned episodes from the history of the Church, most of which are known to many, do not make the Catholic Church, but they do diminish the stature of the Church. But the Church proved that it is capable of critical self-reflection and reform when it called all the bishops of the world together for a council fifty years ago, the Second Vatican Council. We can never stress enough the epoch-making value and ground-breaking nature of Vatican II. But there is widespread temptation even today to deny the scope of an event which changed the face of the Catholic Church and various forms of reductionism are at work. One of the most pernicious ways this is happening is by “belittling the Council to a post-Tridentine normality, downgrading its statements on the pretext that Vatican II was a ‘minor’ council, because it was pastoral.”²⁴ This temptation to see it as continuity with the Church’s tradition has resulted in the abandonment of many key ideas and values of the Council. Instead, the Council was a turning point, and one which has irrevocably changed the Church’s consciousness from what went before. The Second Vatican Council has opened the door to a more tolerant, compassionate and open Church. Pope John XIII wanted the Council to bring the Gospel to the men and women of his time. Pope Francis wants to do that for the men and women of our time. On 8th December, 2015, Pope Francis inaugurated the Jubilee Year of Mercy, and in his homily he said:

²³ 1891, No. 163.

²⁴ “Editorial: Vatican II: Fifty Years Later,” *Concilium* 2012/3, 7.

Today, as we pass through the Holy Door, we also want to remember another door, which fifty years ago the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council opened to the world. This anniversary cannot be remembered only for the legacy of the Council's documents, which testify to a great advance in faith. Before all else, the Council was an encounter. A genuine encounter between the Church and the men and women of our time. An encounter marked by the power of the Spirit, who impelled the Church to emerge from the shoals which for years had kept her self-enclosed so as to set out once again, with enthusiasm, on her missionary journey. After these decades, we again take up this missionary drive with the same power and enthusiasm. The Jubilee challenges us to this openness, and demands that we not neglect the spirit which emerged from Vatican II.

If we embrace the spirit of Vatican II, if we try to genuinely encounter the men and women of our time, marked by the power of the Spirit, then there will be a more tolerant Church. And for that it is essential to return to the Gospel and to put it into practice in the present-day world and orthodoxy is to be judged by the degree to which it serves these goals. There is a tendency in the Church to equate Christian faith with orthodoxy. It must be replaced by a relativization of the concept of orthodoxy and its submission to the most important challenge to Christian life: right practice in the light of the Gospel and by following Jesus. This is what Pope Francis tries to do by what he says and his many symbolic actions. His is a challenge to tolerance.

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Gandhi's Tolerance for Religious Pluralism: A Pointer to a Re-Reading of Jesus' Mission

A. Pushparajan

Mahatma Gandhi is an illustrious exemplar of tolerance not only in fighting against the injustice at the socio-political realms but also in the multi-religious context which was and is peculiar to Indian situation. Gandhi tolerated the evil doer but not the evil that he or she did. That is precisely what Christ teaches through his love maxim in Mt 5:39-42. Paraphrasing this passage, scripture scholars today are bringing out the rich potential of active but non-violent resistance involved in the three realm of injustice: social, economical, and political. Jesus did not teach supine passivity in the face of evil. Nor did he advocate violent resistance to evil doer, but he does teach a third way: assert your own humanity and dignity as a person and refuse to be humiliated, recognise your power as a spirit-filled person be willing to suffer rather than retaliate, through this soul-force expose the injustice of the system, shame the oppressor into repentance and awaken the oppressor to see you in a new light and change from his brutality into all-embracing divine quality of compassion and love. In this article the author attempts to bring out the parallels between the attitude and actions of Gandhi and Jesus and proposes some practical suggestions for the self-understanding of the Church and its mission in the context of growing religious intolerance in our country.

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Introduction

Gandhi, though deeply rooted in Hinduism, modified his understanding of Hindu dharma through his encounters with the teachings of Jesus, notwithstanding many other influences. Also he challenged the missionaries of his day regarding their understanding of their mission. He was even bold enough to accuse them of distorting the message of their Master. He claimed that his understanding of Jesus was more authentic and nearer to the original spirit of Jesus Christ.

Nowhere is this transformation more evident than in the notion of Gandhi's tolerance for diversity of religions. Here there is a modest attempt first to clarify the idea of Gandhian tolerance, both in his socio-political context and that of multi-religious situation, in the first two Parts of this paper. Then, taking a clue from Gandhi's insights and parallel to his mission, an attempt is made to depict standing of Christ's message, and finally to interpret or reinterpret his mission in relation to a religiously pluralist context.

Part 1 Gandhi's idea of Tolerance

Generally, the term tolerance means primarily "the willingness to accept or tolerate (put up with) something /somebody, especially opinions or behaviour that you may not agree with it". It may also indicate "ability to suffer something especially pain and difficult conditions".¹ There are other meanings attached to the term. Thus for example in medicine, tolerance means the capacity to endure continued subjection to a drug or environmental conditions without adverse reaction. In the field of engineering the term is taken to mean permissible limit(s) of variation in manufacturing of an object. For our interest, here, we take the term only in the first two meanings given above, especially because tolerance plays a key role in religion and life.

¹*Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary*, New 7th Edition, (Oxford : OUP) 2005

Now, to formulae Gandhi's ideas of tolerance, we need to get back his life. It was in and through life-situations that he developed his thought, unlike an academic thinker. The first major incident that became a turning point in life was the one that happened in South Africa. Even as he was travelling in a train as a barrister, Gandhi was thrown out of the train just because a white man would not tolerate sitting with a coloured man. It was too big a shock for the youthful Gandhi to react. How could a Christian, believer in the universal message of love taught by Jesus Christ, not tolerate a coloured skinned man, though he was well educated and qualified? He reflected over the whole issue for a long time and finally made a firm resolve not to yield to any such injustice in the future.²

This sense of 'tolerance for the evil doer and yet intolerance to his evil deed' was only the traditional sense of forbearance, tolerance and respect for life which he had acquired from the close acquaintance of his father's friends belonging to Jainism, and from the devout practices of his mother. It was this traditional sense of tolerance that seems to occupy his thoughts and actions of non-violent protest movement against the racial discrimination in South Africa. No doubt it was shaped by other influences like that of Jesus and his teachings (Sermon on the Mount), and political thinkers like David Thoreau and Leo Tolstoy.

In all his campaigns against injustice, Gandhi never took to any violent action, because Gandhi had made a vow not to fight physically through violent means. And he initiated his followers also to follow that rule. The discovery of this unique method was called *Satyagraha*. The goal of *satyagraha* was the triumph of Truth, not triumph of individuals over individuals or even group over group. Hence he could not tolerate any hatred of the opponents. Even when the mob happen to do some harm to the oppressive Englishmen, at Chauri Chaura, Gandhi could not tolerate it. By attacking the English violently and by hating them the so called *satyagrahis* would remain not the votaries of Truth but

² Cf. MK Gandhi, *An Autobiography Or The Story of my Experiments with Truth*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, (First Ed. 1927) Part II, Chapter 8, Henceforth referred to as *Autobiography*,

aggressors and oppressors of others. In that way they would have moved from truth to un-Truth³. To be angry with the wrongdoer and take up arms to fight is the doctrine of violence whereas those believed in God and his righteousness, i.e. in Truth, would, while disobeying the wrongdoer, not be angry with him⁴. He even went to the extent of making reparation for that kind of sin by going on an indefinite fast. He told the teeming millions of freedom fighters: "We should learn to condemn evil, but at the same time love the evil-doer."⁵ He always held this principle: "Real non-cooperation is not cooperation with evil and not with the evil doer"⁶.

Gandhi realized that the real cause of the British oppression was their convenient segregation of religion from politics, failure to apply the core of their religion: the love-maxim to political governance and their social life. That very maxim he put into practice even as he was opposing the oppressors, as a technique of resistance. The sum and substance of their civil-disobedience movement in South Africa consisted in the training of both Hindu and Muslim resisters was set to follow Gandhi: "My doctrine of toleration doesn't include toleration of evil, though it does the toleration of the evil minded"⁷

1.1. Religious Tolerance in Gandhi

Gandhi was rooted in his native religion. Gandhi was born Hindu. He lived as a Hindu and died a Hindu. It was so not merely because he happened to be born of a Hindu family and brought up in a Hindu context. But it was by option. In fact he was almost at the verge of getting converted to Christianity. But thanks to a thorough and prayerful study of various religions and their core-points that he finally decided to be a Hindu by choice.⁸ With regard to Hinduism Gandhi has this observation to make:

I have found it to be that most tolerant of all religious known to me. Its freedom from dogma makes a forcible appeal to me inasmuch as it gives the votary the largest scope for self-expression.

³ CWMG 15/212

⁴ CWMG15/164

⁵ CWMG 20/382

⁶ CWMG 28/128

⁷ CWMG 35/462.

⁸ M.K. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 2/15,

Not being an exclusive religion, it enables the followers of that faith not merely to respect all the other religions, but it also enables them to admire and assimilate whatever may be good in the other faiths. Non-violence is common to all religions, but it has found the highest expression and application in Hinduism (I do not regard Jainism or Buddhism as separate from Hinduism). Hinduism believes in the oneness not of merely all human life but in the oneness of all that lives. It is a practical application of the belief in the oneness and transmigration is a direct consequence of that belief in transmigration is a direct consequence of that belief.⁹

However it was Gandhi's lot to bring together people of many religions in a common struggle against injustice. Already during his sojourn in South Africa Gandhi united the Hindu and Muslim labourers more than 12,000 in fighting against the racial discrimination of the British who were all Christians. Afterwards in the struggles of political liberation of India, Gandhi had to pool the cooperation of people belonging to different religions. In particular he had to face conflicts between Hindus and Muslims mainly because of the emerging Hindutva ideology along with the Indian nationalism. In such a context where Muslims and Hindus didn't want to be together. He was quick to perceive the overpowering influence of the Hindu extremists in the nationalist movement. Not only did he mitigate it but also he instilled confidence in the minorities and brought in the necessary cooperation of Muslims, Christians and Parsis to work with the Hindus to the fight against the political slavery of the British Imperialism. The members of the Satyagraha Ashram belonged to all major religions. Gandhi had to not only play a strategically safe game but also give a theologically sound base, being a religious person. So, even though he was a practising Hindu he came out with a trans-religious understanding of God¹⁰ which was acceptable and applicable to all the religions and their followers.

⁹ M.K.Gandhi, *Young India*, 20-10-'27, <http://www.mkgandhi.org/indiadreams/chap62.htm>

¹⁰ A. Pushparajan, "Gandhi's Trans-religious concept of God" in *Romancing the Sacred*, (Bangalore: ATC), 2007, ACPI Publications No 8, pp.373-406; Also see "Trans-religious Spirituality of Gandhi" in *Jnana-Deepa Journal, Journal of Religious Studies*, (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth), 7/2 June-July 2004, pp 29-43,

In the course of his political campaigns against the British Raj, Gandhi realized that Indian society was suffering from its own systemic evils such as untouchability and gender discrimination. Nobody dared to remove it systematically. People did not even think of it as evil. They even justified the evil of untouchability as religiously sanctioned. It was Gandhi who awakened conscience of his fellow religionists and mobilized the people of his religion the necessity of removing untouchability from their mind and society. In that context, Gandhi had to stake his claims that he was a *Sanatana* Hindu, and yet he dared to re-interpret it in such a way that the intolerable evil was not tolerated by his people. So the whole fight was really an 'interreligious cooperation'.

Similarly Gandhi wooed the volunteers from every major religion in carrying out the Constructive Programmes¹¹ like the removal of untouchability, prohibition, health education, economic equality etc. Again he gave to communal unity such a prime importance that he made as the first and most basic of all his constructive programmes. It was indeed beyond his control that Partition took place. When communal frenzy cropped up, Gandhi went to Calcutta, on a pilgrimage of peace, took up the 21 days fasting, and got the communal peace established.

Gandhi viewed a communal problem primarily as a religious problem. So he was keen on trying to solve it at the heart level, through religious means. In that connection Gandhi was conducting interreligious prayer among people, thereby cultivating a culture of peace among people of all religions. That is how he organized interreligious prayers during the last 100 days of his life. On many occasions Gandhi was attacked by people. Bombs were set in his prayer meetings. But he didn't try to revenge himself. It was in the prayer ground that a Hindu fanatic shot him Gandhi. Even at that agonizing moment Gandhi didn't say anything bad about his killer. He gave his last breadth and shedding his blood for the ransom of communalists. It was indeed a death of atonement for the sin of fanaticism. All the more reason for us to draw a lesson on tolerance in the multi-religious situation.

¹¹ M.K. Gandhi, *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1941

1.2 Interreligious Harmony in the State Governance

Gandhi was totally opposed to any one religion becoming a state religion. It is by a definite denial of the religious influence of the majority community into the state that Gandhi contributed to India becoming a secular state. At the same time he did not visualize total separation of religion from the state, as the western Secularism had implied in their polity. But he certainly wanted all religions to permeate the polity with their true religious aroma in the governance of the state, shedding of all sectarianism and fundamentalisms:

Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion, which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which *transcends* Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the Truth within and which ever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which... leaves the soul restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated that true correspondence between the Maker and itself¹².

It is with this meaning of religion that Gandhi allowed India to function as a Republic. So, for Gandhi, India could not be a theocratic state, but still not a state devoid of any religious influence. It was to be a state with influence from all religions, minus sectarianism of each. How fittingly has Louis Fischer remarked about the irony that Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who was not religious, established Pakistan as a state based on religion, while Gandhi, who was completely religious, worked to establish a secular state.¹³

How fittingly did Gandhi plead for tolerance of religions along with their diversity but not with uniformity:

¹² *Young India*, 12.5.1920, Cf. Ed. Shriman Narayan, *The Voice of Truth*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1969, p.263, emphasis added

¹³ Louis Fisher, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, New York : Harper and Brothers, 1950, p.430, as cited by Terrence J. Rynne, *Gandhi and Jesus: The Saving Power of Nonviolence*, Indian Edition (Bangalore : Asian Trading Corporation) 2009, p. 17

So long as the human race continues, differences of creeds and religions will indeed exist, since there are many minds and not one. If we look at nature, it is full of diversities. To expect that at any stage in the history of human race the world will have a single religion and a single creed is, I think as good as wishing that the laws of nature should become topsy-turvy... Tolerance should be our aim. If all of us hold uniform views where then is the scope of this genuine virtue of tolerance? This search for uniformity is as futile as looking for flowers in the sky. The only possible alternative for us to tolerate one another's views ¹⁴

It was a trans-religious way of understanding religion that had immense impact on the political scenario of India, immediately after the Partition. Again it was that trans-religious approach of Gandhi that paved a way for smooth co-existence of all religions in Indian polity. Thereby, Gandhi has really contributed to the possibility of interreligious harmony in the secular India. The growing communal disharmony in our country should impel us to see the crucial importance of keeping the Gandhian legacy alive and operative today. The Gandhian attitude of tolerance of other religions is a challenge to Christians to follow the attitude of Jesus their Lord and Master who inspired also Gandhi.

Part 2

Jesus' Tolerance

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that Mahatma Gandhi is an illustrious exemplar of tolerance not only in fighting against the injustice at the socio-political realms but also in the multi-religious context which was and is peculiar to Indian situation. Gandhi tolerated the evil doer but not the evil that he or she did. That is precisely what Christ teaches through his love maxim in Mt 5:39-42. Paraphrasing this passage, scripture scholars today¹⁵ are bringing out the rich potential of active but non-violent resistance involved in the three realm of injustice: social, economics, and political. For instance a renowned scripture scholar Walter Wink holds that Jesus did not teach supine passivity in the face of evil.

¹⁴ CWMG 26/323-324.

¹⁵ Walter Wink, *Violence and Nonviolence in South Africa: Jesus' Third Way*, Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1987, Ch. 2.

Nor did he advocate violent resistance to evil doer, but he does teach a third way: assert your own humanity and dignity as a person and refuse to be humiliated, recognise your power as a spirit-filled person be willing to suffer rather than retaliate, through this soul-force expose the injustice of the system, shame the oppressor into repentance and awaken the oppressor to see you in a new light and change from his brutality into divinity. To illustrate the point Wink makes a detailed study of the key text of the Sermon on the Mount, Mt.5:39-42.

The words by Jesus in this passage cannot be taken to mean that Jesus is encouraging cowardice and utter compliance with the oppressor to walk all over us. He is, rather cautioning us against being made over into the very evil we oppose by adopting its methods and spirit. He is warning us not to mirror evil and become the very thing we oppose. What he really means is: "Don't react violently against the one who is evil. But resist his injustice in a non-violent way, asserting your own independence." Ordinarily people in the face of evil, react in terms of two alternatives: 'fight or flight'. As against it, Jesus advocates a third way: 'actively resist, but non-violently'. For this Jesus gives three examples: a) social, b) economic and c) political.

2.1. Practise of Tolerance

Jesus' teaching on tolerance was not theoretical. He taught his followers how to practise tolerance in dealing with those who do evil against them.

a. *"Turn the other cheek"* (Mt.5:39)

In the first example, Why the right cheek? In society which consists of right-handed people a blow by the right hand would strike the left cheek of the other. Certainly in the Jewish society the left hand was used only for unclean tasks. Even to gesture with the left hand at Qumran carried the penalty of ten days' penance. Hence, the only way one could naturally strike the right cheek with the right hand would be with the back of the hand. A backhand slap was the usual way of admonishing inferiors. Masters backhanded slaves; husbands, wives; parents, children; men, women; Romans, Jews.

In such a situation of unequal relations it is unthinkable to think of a violent response by the inferior to the other. The only normal response would be trembling submission. That is precisely which Jesus does not want his people to accept. Equal as they are before the eyes of God, they are **not to tolerate** a situation in which they subjected to these indignities and dehumanizing treatment. Nor can they take recourse to retaliation or open rebellion with a view to establishing their human dignity and equality with the other; such a response, in a set of unequal relations, would be suicidal. So a third way that Jesus suggests to the already humiliated people to turn the other cheek. For, by turning the other cheek the slave, is saying, in effect, "By slapping me on my right cheek you want to humiliate me. I deny you the power to humiliate me. I am a human being just like you. Just because of your status you cannot demean me. Try again on my left cheek (where it is only equals or peer group members can slap each other). Thus, the slave has been stripped of his power of his master to dehumanize him.

b. "Give the undergarment" (Mt.5:40)

The second example is set in a court of law where one is sued for his outer garment. Jewish law strictly required return of loan every evening at sunset. In the context of the Jewish law as prescribed in Deut. 24:10-13, 17; Exod. 22:25-27; Amos 2:7-8; Ezek.18:5-9 if the debtor is too poor to repay the debt, and his creditor can summon him to court to exact repayment by taking away the outer garment. In such a situation the poor would naturally be infuriated with a system because it subjects them to humiliation by stripping them of their outer garments. In such a situation Jesus suggests to the poor to give their undergarments as well, and thereby to transcend this attempt to humiliate him to rise above shame, registering a stunning protest against the system. In other words Jesus advises the poor to show such a protest by which he would have said in effect, "You want my robe? Here, take everything! Now you've got all I have except my body. Is that what you'll take next?" By this, the table is suddenly turned on the creditor. There he would stand, covered with shame, the poor debtor's outer garment in the one hand, his undergarment in the other. By refusing to be awed by the power of the cruel creditor, the powerless are

emboldened to seize the initiative that is a practical, strategic measure for empowering the oppressed.

c. "Go the second mile" (Mt.5:41)

The third example about going the second mile, is drawn from the context of Roman military occupation where normally soldiers will coerce people to carry their luggage while moving from camp to camp. But the Roman law said it has to be just for a mile. Now Jesus asking the civilian to carry his pack a second mile, voluntarily, he is not asking the fellow Jews to assist the enemy, nor to reluctantly comply with servile imposition, but shows how the oppressed can recover the initiative and assert their human dignity in a situation that cannot for the time being be changed. When the civilians have taken back the power of choice, the soldier is thrown off balance. When the soldier, at the next mile marker, reluctantly reaches to assume his pack, and the civilian says, "Oh no, let me carry it another mile." He would only be perplexed with such questions as: What is he up to? Is this a provocation? Is he insulting my strength? Being kind? Will this civilian file a complaint? Is he going to create trouble? If usually the Roman soldier has enjoyed feeling superior to the so called civilian of the 'chosen race' by imposing his pack upon him, he will not enjoy it, now when the civilian volunteers to go another mile. He would even plead with a Jew to give back his pack. By discomfiting their oppressors, the people at the bottom of society are now able to assert their equality and are able to recover their humanity.

As Indian Christians it is incumbent on our part to draw inspiration from the father of the nation and re-read our Master's mission. To carry out this task, it may be useful to highlight the major landmarks of our discussions in the two preceding sections so that we bring out the salient features of Gandhi, the man and the mission, and draw out read parallels of meaning of our Master's mission.

To highlight the major landmarks of our foregoing discussion:

1. Gandhi's public life began in South Africa in troubled weather. It was his ability to tolerate evil-minded person though not evil, that made his mission and method unique.

2. On his return to India also, Gandhi continued the same sort of approach towards all the campaigns against injustice of many sorts in the same unique perspective of *satyagraha*
3. Being a religious seeker, Gandhi had to follow this approach on a genuinely religious lines: not only tolerating the enemies but even loving them genuinely.
4. As he faced severe opposition from the so called religious leaders of his religion, he had to stake his claims that he was truly a Hindu
5. At the same time he re-interpreted his native religion in a trans-religious way.
6. Gandhi also established the authenticity of his universalism through orthopraxis, which demanded him of a very heavy toll, his very life, which he gave voluntarily.

With these six points, we may try to see parallels in Jesus and thereby re-read the message of our Master.

2.2. The enemy is not merely to be tolerated but be loved

In the ministry that Jesus began in Galilee or he continued it in his native place there was one thing that remained constant. Whether in the midst of non-Jews or with Jews, the ministry of Jesus was always the same: kingdom-mission. In that context his followers were sure to follow stiff opposition. "They were sent like sheep to a pack of wolves" (Mt. 10: 16). However they cannot retaliate the opponents with their coin. The key concepts of their life-style itself was to be distinctive and unique.

a. As regards Anger

You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your

gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. (Mt. 5: 21- 26)

b. About Retaliation

³⁸“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. (Mt. 5: 38-42)

c. On Loving Enemies

⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Mt.5:43-48)

It is paradoxical that these maxims were shelved by theologians of Christian spirituality as good for private perfection, that too to be practised by the so called consecrated people. May be because they were thought as impractical in the secular or social fields. Particularly in the political field it was impossible to be applied. Hence the so called Christendom had formulated separate rules for governance which sanctioned ‘just war’ theory, whereas the love maxims of the Master were to govern one’s interpersonal relations of individuals. Strange but

true that a non-Christian, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi took these principles seriously and applied them in the field of politics successfully. This is the first time ever in history that the maxims were applied to the political context of fighting for justice, equality and human dignity.

2.3. Jesus' Trans-religious Message

Although Jesus was a Jew, born lived and died a Jew, yet he transcended his native religion. It is significant that Jesus never even used the word 'Yahweh' for God in all his teachings. Now Jesus born of a Jewish mother, and brought up as a practicing Jew, he must have learnt to call God as *Yahweh*, *Elohim*, or *Adonai*. And especially he was having Jewish disciples and preaching mostly in a Jewish audience, and even engaged in theological controversies with teachers of Law, he was expected to have made use of the name of God as he had learnt in his mother tongue. The absence of such names of God is conspicuous in the Gospels. Nowhere is it clear in the teachings of Jesus. This silence speaks volumes about the mindset of Jesus' religiosity. By not using his native phrase about God and instead using only the most common word 'father' to indicate God, Jesus wants his message as to be understood as universal God for all rather than as parochial god, worshipped and appropriated as a tribal god of the Jews. It is only by purposely avoiding the word 'Yahweh' that he could make his message acceptable to the non-Jews as well. Had he used this term 'Yahweh' he would have rejected others in his message, because Yahweh was an exclusively used by Jews to indicate the Almighty. Instead he used the word 'Father': 'Abba' because it was understood by all, people of other religions too. It was an interreligious term accepted by all whereby he wanted to remove the element of sectarianism. It indicates Jesus' interreligious approach. It reveals Jesus' 'universalistic' approach. This absence of the Hebrew term 'Yahweh' for God in the New Testament, means Jesus right from the beginning was interested in making an appeal to the whole humanity the target of his mission. This he did not merely as a strategy but also he backed it with a sound theological framework. This is very evident from the long dialogue that Jesus engages himself with the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4: 3:25). It is striking how Jesus is going on emphasizing the unitive

aspects of the diverse religions while the Samaritan woman is going on giving importance to the divisive aspects of religious pursuits, But finally the Lord wins her by giving a solution to the diversity of religions in terms of the need of worshipping the one God in Truth and Spirit.

2.4. Jesus' Orthopraxis

As we have already seen above Jesus, as rooted in his religion, loved the city of Jerusalem. However he went beyond the city of Jerusalem. He went "away" from the city of Jerusalem while giving his great commission to his disciples. (Mt. 28: 16). Similarly as a good Jew Jesus was keen on fulfilling the requirements of the Law. However he also enunciated: "the law is made for man, not man is made for the law" (Lk.6: 1-11). The Pharisees followed the law meticulously, according to the letter of the law – but Jesus goes beyond the law, following it in spirit. So also, Jesus was so attached to the Temple that he even wept at the future fate of it. However, he never made temple alone as the place for prayer, he went to the mountain to pray. He did not restrict the presence of God to the temple. He found God in the multitude of people and also on the mountaintop. Jesus was keen on observing the rituals but he was not bound by the ritualism. He went beyond ritualism – the inner purity of the heart was important for him, and not external ritual ablutions alone.

From all these it is evident that Jesus, while rooted in his religion, he went beyond it, out of its boundaries. This is indeed key element of religious tolerance. There Jesus did not tolerate their fanatic approach or fundamentalist interpretations. Even as Jesus was living his native religion, he never made his religion a fetish. He was never fanatic about his faith. He always went beyond the particular teachings of the Law, the Jewish symbols and values and pointed at the universal import of all those practices. He even went to the level of appreciating people of other religions and establishing cordiality receptivity and reciprocity through dialogue with them.¹⁶

¹⁶ A. Pushparajn, "Interreligious Dialogue After Jesus' Model" in *Mission Today, A journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*, (Shillong: Sacred Heart Theological College) Vol.I. Nos.1-3, Jan-Sep.1999, pp.76-87

Jesus also established the authenticity of his universalism through his deeds, words, discussions, negotiations, discourses and even entering into controversies with the fanatic minded Pharisees. This reinterpreted orthodoxy, corroborated with his orthopraxis, which demanded him of a very heavy toll, his very life, which he gave voluntarily. In the process, Jesus gets caught in the plot of the Pharisees and the leaders of the people, and was killed. Even the immediate cause of his death was the Jews' grudge against his earlier ministry among people of Gentiles as it is clear from Jn 12: 20-26. It is intriguing to see why Jesus talks about his death, at the instance of the Greeks coming to meet the Lord, as he was teaching in the Temple. This passage has always been un-understandable to me for a long time. But given the line of thought that we have followed above, it is quite understandable. Jesus began his ministry in the Greco-Galilean context, preaching a universal message. Afterwards he had to change his strategy giving priority of preaching to the lost sheep of Israel. In the processes he had to face a lot of difficulty with the fanatic minded followers of Jewish religion. He could not tolerate their approach. Still he was trying his level best to convince them, with love, warning, even with just anger against their unjust behaviours etc. It was at that juncture when his good old friends /disciples from that Greco Galilean came to pay a visit to him, the Lord sees that the plot of the fanatics have now a solid and final reason to put him to death. Naturally therefore Jesus gets into ecstasy and surrenders himself totally to the Father exclaiming: "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." (Jn 12: 25-27).

Part 3

Certain Theological Presuppositions

Central to Gandhi's understanding and practice of tolerance is his conception of Truth (*satya*) which he takes to be the moral law governing the universe and which he identifies with God. Such reality and truth can be grasped and realized not through the intellect but only through Truthful living, truth abiding in word, thought and deed. To the question 'what religion is', various answers have been given in the past. They differ

from religion to religion. For instance, the Semitic religions would define religion in terms of binding force with God, revelation etc. On the contrary Indian religions would prefer to define religion as *dharma*, a duty based approach. In fact it is on account of this difference in approach that most of the foreign missionaries¹⁷ accused the Indian religions of being merely 'human searches' while their religion was the 'divinely revealed' religions. In contrast, Gandhi gives a quite distinct definition of religion which is applicable to all types of religions. Without going into details of his analysis, we may just put his thoughts in the form of certain propositions, grouped under two captions:

3.1. What Religion is

- 1) Gandhi starts with the universal phenomenon of the whole of humanity: There is a fundamental problem about the very human existence. It may be popularly perceived as the **uncertainty, insecurity or impermanence of life**. Nobody has a warranty card on his/her life. Nobody is certain how long he/she is going to live on earth. Philosophically people have emphasized the state of **imperfect-ness and faulty-ness** as a constituent factor of existence itself. Henrich kraemer for example would identify the constant predicament of human being as being caught between the two: apish and angelic qualities.¹⁸ There are certain tendencies of animality on the one hand but there is also a thirst and propensity for divinity. To put it differently, there is on the one hand an almost natural yearning for perfection, but there is also a downward pull. The same problem has been viewed by various religions in various ways: The soul being in state of 'bondage' (*samsara*) or 'ignorance' (*avidya*) or of misery (*dhuka*) or defiled by karmic particles, 'selfishness' or sinfulness that St Paul talk of in Rom.7:14 b.
- 2) Next, Gandhi holds that each religion has addressed itself to this fundamental problem and has positively and successfully grappled

¹⁷ The best example of such an approach may be Henrik Kraemer, *Why Christianity of all religions?* London: Lutterworth Press, 1962

¹⁸ Hendrik Kraemer, *Why Christianity among all Religions?* (London: Foundaation of Christian Mission) 1962, P.99

with it. That each religion has successfully tackled the problem is proved, according to Gandhi, by the fact of attainments or the 'fact of saints': the liberated souls (*Jivan Mukta*), realized souls (*jnani*), the enlightened ones (*Buddha*), the victorious souls (*Jina*), the Risen (the *Christos*). These are facts. One cannot deny the fact. There could be no dispute against fact.

- 3) When a saint emerges out of a society, some of those who are around him are drawn to him because, having witnessed him to have tackled the fundamental problem so successfully they too would like to tread the same path so as to get themselves liberated from the state of imperfectness. Thus there arises a close circle of immediate followers or disciples to whom he is bound to 'show' the path of perfection.
- 4) Now, as the saint tries to explain it to his close disciples his 'path', he could do so only in the way they can know, using the language which they are conversant with, making use of the symbols they have been acquainted with, and in and through the cultural modes in which they have been brought up. After the earthly sojourn of that saint, his followers would try to 'show' the path of their master to other aspiring souls, may be by simply repeating the words of the master, or may be also by re-casting them according to the changed conditions of their times and the varied capacities of the hearers. Mostly they would focus on cultivating the same ways their Master had done, and using the same symbols, habits and customs. This is how a particular cult or a form of worship arises.

In short then religion is religion only because of that person of Attainment and the path of attainment, or the 'fact of saints'

3. 2.The Plurality of Religions

- 1) As a religion begins to grow, some more modification bound to occur. The simple folk, straightforward and plain spoken persons would abide by what they were told to do. However a sophisticated person may be disturbed by a particular symbol or concept. So he may raise some doubts about the meaning of the symbol, or even about authenticity of the guru. In the process, therefore, appropriate answers need to be

given to quench the genuine questions raised by some searching minds which has raised doubts why should we take this symbol or that gesture or follow this practice, why not that?

- 2) Thus there arises a set of explanation regarding the solution differently. Depending upon the ability of the intellectual sophistication, people are able to give justification to the cult. This is how a creed of a religion arises. Besides, as the community begins to grow in size, eventually a set of rules and regulations begin to crop up to maintain the unity as well as the identity of the group of believers. Thus arises a particular code of conduct as the hallmark of that religion. In short then, though a particular cult, creed and code emerges ultimately from the original life of Attainment, yet it takes on different forms in response to the differences of time, place and culture.
- 3) Religion therefore cannot be just an answer to the fundamental problem flowing from Attained soul, but it has to be couched in certain cultic practices, creedal explanations and moral codes. All these are all determined by the geographical and climatic conditions and historic reasons. Therefore Religions are bound to be varied, because of different languages, geographic conditions and climatic reasons and historic factors. Given the variety of factors even the statement of problem, and the formulation of the answers is bound to be different.

3.3. Implications for Interreligious Harmony

Granted the validity of Gandhi's considerations regarding what religion is and what religions are, the following points flow from the 3.1. and 3.2, logically:

- All religions are true, since they derive their source from God the Absolute Truth, more so because all have produced the fact of saints.
- All religions are also imperfect for the simple reason that human instrumentality is involved in both receiving the Revelation as well as its transmission by commentators.
- All religions are equal in the sense that every religion has the Truth and at the same time each religion is imperfect. There is the need

for every religion to grow from imperfection to Truth or from the less perfect to more perfect. In this there is equality of religions.

- In this then everyone should learn to tolerate other religions. This does not mean that the evil accretions of religions could be tolerated.
- All religions are bound to be different from one another, because of they are all couched in cults, creed and code which are necessarily different because of the differences of time, place, culture and history in which they arise.
- No religion can claim uniqueness in terms of cult, code or creed. Granted that Attainment is the core of religion, and that cult, code and creed are results of Attainment but explained in a variety of ways because of variety of contexts and sophistication, then what matters is re-living of that Attainment not the particular doctrine, a particular cult or code is. Any doctrine, cult or code is acceptable so long as it makes Attainment possible.

Here Gandhi introduces an important category for theology of religions: the distinction between Absolute Truth and Relative Truth. Granted that truth of religion is fundamentally in terms of Attainment, then God is the Absolute Truth (AT) because He alone is Attainment, pure and simple, the Transcendent and the Perfect. That Truth, when revealed to /perceived by human beings, it is Relative Truth (RT), because it is seen in relation to the subjective conditions of the subjects, differently depending upon the perceivers' viewpoints, standpoints, and other factors like the geographic, climatic and cultural. So all religions are Relative truths (RTs). By the very fact that human beings are imperfect, the RTs are bound to be imperfect. The AT may be called 'Father' in Christianity, Allah in Islam, Bhrama in Hinduism, Sunyta in Buddhism. These different labels do not mean different gods. In fact, it is impossible, philosophically to hold plurality of Gods.

All religions, in so far they are all RTs, are valid if only they are intimately connected with AT. No one RT can attempt at a comparison with other RTs and claim superiority over any other. If you do, conflict would arise. If each RT see to it that it is really connected with AT, and is keen on going nearer to the AT more and more, it has done its duty.

This itself will contribute to interreligious harmony. The task of each religion, therefore, is to remove its own imperfections and go nearer to the AT rather than claiming uniqueness to itself, comparing itself with other RTs, and creating conflicting among religions.

According to Gandhi, however, a person's grasp of reality or truth, which is Absolute, is always grasped partially conditioned by the subjective conditions and the individual limitations of people. This is what Gandhi calls 'Relative Truth' (Truth in relation to the varied factors of the one who receives it). Therefore one should not impose one's perception of Truth on others through force or violence. To put it differently one will have to tolerate the varied perceptions by varied people in relation to their subjective factors and determining conditions.

To put it in the words of Mahatma:

So long as there are different human heads so long will there be different religions, but the secret of a true religious life is to tolerate one another's religion. What may appear evil to us in certain religious practices is not necessarily evil to those who follow those practices... knowing those differences I must love even those who differ from me...

Pointing to a tree under the shadow of which Gandhi was sitting, Gandhi proceeded to say:

No two leaves of this very tree under whose shadow we are sitting, are alive, though they spring from same root, but even as the leaves live together in perfect harmony and present to us a beautiful whole, so must we divided humanity present to the outsider looking upon us a beautiful whole. That can be done when we begin to love each other and tolerate each other in spite of differences.¹⁹

On another occasion Gandhi said:

The only condition on which unity and freedom are possible is mutual toleration amongst all who call themselves Indians be they Hindus, Musalmans, Christians, Parsis, Jews or what not²⁰

Conclusion

From the whole discussion made above, it is clear that there are not only a lot of parallels between Gandhi and Jesus in reference to tolerance but also that one helps us re-read our Master in a new light.

¹⁹CWMG 26/96

²⁰CWMG 25/279

Such a study makes the Christian discipleship more challenging and demanding so that we the avowedly Christians take the Sermon on the Mount more seriously and apply them to every realm of life, including social and political.

The urgency of such an approach arises from Gandhi's tolerance because, though formally a Hindu, yet lived the authentic discipleship of Jesus which none of Christians had ever made before him during the 2000 years of Christianity's existence. If Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela or Archbishop Tutu have tried to see the relevance of Jesus' message in their socio political contexts it is all only after learning from Mahatma Gandhi who was the first in human history to put the message of tolerance enshrined in the Sermon on Mount into practice in the socio political field.

Again Gandhi is the first one who has given a sound theological framework to accommodate religious tolerance in religiously pluralistic context. If we apply it would be a sound antidote to the religious fundamentalism.

It is no wonder that a famous evangelical missionary Stanely E. Jones made a memorable tribute to Gandhi in the following words:

I am still an evangelist. I bow to Mahatma Gandhi, but I kneel at the feet of Christ and give him my full and final allegiance. And yet a little man, who fought a system in the framework of which I stand, has taught me more of the spirit of Christ than perhaps any other man in East or West. This book is a symbol of my gratitude.²¹

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²¹ E. Stanley Jones, 'Foreword', *Mahatma Gandhi, An Interpretation*, (New York Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press), 1948,

Islamophobia and Islamic Fundamentalism: A Response

Ishanand Vempeny

As in other religions, in Islam too there are seeds of fundamentalism, exclusivism and terrorism. But there also the numerous seeds and inspirations in the Quran that promote tolerance, inter-religious openness and dialogue. According to the author, in order to respond to the crying need of reform in Islam, a hermeneutical re-interpretation of the Holy Quran is the need of the day. The Islamic tradition has many examples of re-interpretation and reform as in the cases of Avicenna and Al-Ghazali who were real Mujaddids. It needs a council of scholars both in religious and secular matters. Today's Islam does not lack Mujaddids, Imams of the like of the Imam of Egypt's al-Azhar Mosque connected with the university. It could be somewhat like the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council which saved to a great extent Christianity from fundamentalism and exclusivism. The principle of re-reading the scriptures have to be followed taking seriously the contextual challenges of universally growing Islamophobia and irrepressibly growing Islamic terrorism.

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Introduction

A few weeks after the terrorist attack in Paris on 13th November, 2015, there appeared an interesting scene in the TV channels and in the newspapers. A Muslim young man stands in a crowded Paris suburb with his face covered and with the caption on his body: "I am a Muslim. Please kiss me." Quite a few French non-Muslims, both men and

women approached him sympathetically and kissed him. Soon there gathered a crowd of white French men/women around him.

This shows that even after the Paris terrorist attack many of the French still remain liberal. Besides, there was a feeling of tolerance among the French. Indeed, the atmosphere a little farther from the crowd proclaimed loudly that many French Muslims who have nothing to do with terrorism, want France be free from Islamophobia. Today can we say that only a few French are affected by this ethnic disease and only a few French Muslims have the '*jihadistic*' inclinations?

The truth of the matter is that the ethnic disease of Islamophobia is spreading all over the West and Islamic terrorism, even with greater brutality and fury, is causing the spread of this phobia far and wide. The American Presidential candidate declared publicly, if he would become the President, no more Muslims would be allowed to come to USA. Even Germany which welcomed more than a million Muslim Refugees is having second thoughts in this matter. After the attack by the refugees on the German women and sexual harassment of many of them in Cologne by more than a thousand refugees, anti-refugee and anti-Islamic attitudes are growing there. Captions calling the refugees '*Rape-Fugees*' are appearing in different parts of Germany. The German Chancellor Angela Merkel has become a butt of negative criticism in Germany and beyond.

The Rightist and anti-immigration parties of France, Netherlands, Belgium and the like are creating anti-Islamic atmosphere all over Europe. The finding of terrorists among the refugees is making the Islamophobia more intense and intolerable. The cruel shooting of Mother Teresa Sisters in Yemen, tying them to posts, has added fuel to Islamophobia in Europe and beyond. After shooting them their skulls were broken with heavy weapons. They have kidnapped their chaplain, an Indian priest and were planning to crucify him on Good Friday 2016. Mother Teresa is a revered icon all over the West and her sisters share this Western reverence. Such cruel and shocking deeds of terrorism does make Islamophobia spread far and wide.

I. The Fact of Islamophobia

The NATO powers and the Russians have been opposing ISIS with their Air Forces. One of the reasons why their land forces are not sent

is that these forces are well aware of the cruel torture and sadistic murder by the ISIS of the defeated victims. The Americans and the Russians do not want even a single soldier from their armed forces fall into the hands of these brutish terrorists.

For instance, a Jordanian pilot fell into the hands of the ISIS. A few lines from the description of this horrific deed taken from the Google:

“By WalidShoebat (with co-operation from The Right Scoop)
The Jordanian pilot from the U.S. led-Coalition Muath Al-Kassasbeh was not given food for 5 days and then is arrayed in front of armed terrorists as if this was part of a Roman arena, to be caged like an animal... But this is Muslim reality TV at its best, a plunge into the dark history of Islām. The POW pilot is then soaked with petrol and set on fire while professionally filming his slow suffering as a sacrificial offering to Allah and with no remorse to the screaming and melting of a human being. This is not something we suggest you watch, but ask: how can the world stand idly by while we see this and still think that Islam is a peace loving religion?¹

Meghnad Desai writes about this cruel Islamic movement:

“The war in the Middle East that Assad and Baghdadi are waging is of Muslims against fellow Muslims... Thousands more Muslims – Shia and Sunni – are being massacred by the murderous regimes in the region. The Middle East is almost 100 per cent Muslim but the majority of the world’s Muslims live outside. Why have the majority living in India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria not protested against this massacre?”²

The Wahhabistic fundamentalism of Saudi Arabia, with its fanatic propaganda and money power is increasing Islamophobia both in the West and in the East. There are rumors that the Wahhabi Mullahs and Maulanas are secretly encouraging the Muslims with terrorist inclinations, especially the Muslim prisoners to continue fighting for the ISIS or Caliphate.

¹ Link: <http://shoebat.com/2015/02/03/watch-horrific-video-isis-burning-pow-jordanian-pilot>.

² *Indian Express*, “The big Muslim tragedy,” November 22, 2015, p.13

The Muslim Reactions to ISIS atrocities seem too late and too mild while under-hand support by various Islamic nations and associations are becoming too obvious. This leads to an intensification of Islamophobia. The Wahhabism-centered Saudi Arabia seems to many people including the USA the biggest villain. A typical example is the help promised by Saudi Arabia for building a thousand mosques in Europe for the refugees instead of helping them with food, shelter and other material necessities of life. Many Europeans know that Wahhabism is spread through mosque-centered propaganda. An American Robert Baer had published a book soon after the 9/11 attack on World Trade Centre in New York with the title "*Sleeping with the Devil*".³

About this book Laura Rozen writes:

"But Robert Baer's tale is not only an indictment of the Saudi royal family and its excesses. The real target of Baer's criticism is the U.S. government itself. According to Baer, successive presidential administrations have stubbornly ignored the facts about Riyadh and other oil-rich Persian Gulf allies. In the wake of 9-11, of course, the evidence that the Saudis played a significant if not dominant role in those attacks, and in the ranks and leadership of al-Qaeda, was overwhelming."⁴

Wahhabism or Wahhabi mission is a religious movement or branch of Sunni Islam. It has been variously described as 'ultraconservative', 'austere', 'fundamentalist', 'puritanical' (or 'puritan') and as an Islamic 'reform movement' to restore 'pure monotheistic worship' (*tawhid*) by scholars and advocates, and as an 'extremist pseudo-Sunni movement' by opponents.⁵ Saudi Arabia used to send enormous amount of Petro-dollars to Muslims in the non-Muslim countries for propaganda. Recently it was reported that the Muslim Religious leaders were secretly instigating the prisoners in Iraq to carry on with terrorist attacks on the non-Muslims and moderate Muslims. These reports make the Western nations suspect that Islam as a whole is for terrorism.

³ Robert Baer, Publisher: Three Rivers Press, 2004

⁴ Link: <http://web.archive.org/web/20070422112604/http://www.prospect.org/print-friendly/webfeatures/2003/08/rozen-1-08-15.html>

⁵ Link: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wahhabism>

The unpleasant thing is that even the cruelest terrorist activities are not strongly opposed by most Muslims.

“The West has long known about the key and destructive role that Saudi Arabia plays in the financing and support of terrorist groups worldwide. In a 2009 leaked diplomatic cable, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton wrote that Saudi Arabia is the world’s largest source of funds for Islamist militant groups including al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Another cable reveals how the Lashkar-e-Taiba, responsible for 26/11, used a Saudi-based front company to fund its activities.”⁶

Varadarajan expresses the following view on the Saudi hand in the terrorist activities of the ISIS, in the *Indian Express*:

“There are Saudi-funded mosques and madrasas and deceptively benign evangelical institutions, as well as Saudi-moneyed apologists, all over Europe and North America (not to mention Asia and Islamic Africa); but there’s not a single Christian church, or Hindu temple, or Sikh Gurudwara, or Buddhist temple or synagogue on the soil of Saudi Arabia.”⁷

The *Indian Express* contains an article “Looking Within” taken from *The Economist Newspaper* gives some valuable suggestions for reform in Islam:

“Western leaders have long urged Muslims to do more to counter jihadist ideology. This month Barrack Obama said moderate Muslims, including scholars and clerics, had a responsibility to reject ‘twisted interpretations of Islam’ and the lie ‘that America and the West are somehow at war with Islam’. On February 23rd Tony Abbott, Australia’s prime minister, urged Muslim leaders to say that Islam is a religion of peace – ‘and mean it’ ... On February 22nd Ahmed al-Tayeb, the grand imam of Egypt’s al-Azhar mosque, part of a university that is the Sunni world’s oldest seat of learning, declared that extremism was caused by ‘bad interpretations of the Koran and the Sunna (the doings of the

⁶*Indian Express*, Hayder Al-Khoei, “A War against Itself,” January 7, 2016, p.10

⁷*Indian Express*, Tunku Varadarajan, Reverse Swing, “Christmas in the Ummah,” December 27, 2015, p.12

Prophet Muhammad)', and that what was taught in Islamic schools and universities needed to change.'⁸

We have seen some brief descriptions by different authors about the explosive spread of the contagious disease of Islamophobia in the Western nations. Every terrorist attack adds fuel to the fire of this disease. Let us have a key-hole peep into the dark world of Islamic terrorism.

II. The Fact of Islamic Terrorism

The daily news media come up with more and more gruesome terrorism by ISIS. Some time back there appeared on some of the news channels the video-shot of a boy, a little above KG class age. The boy was made to sit on the shoulders of a hand-leg bound prisoner. After giving a small sword the ISIS members were instigating the boy to cut off the head of the prisoner. Can any sect in any religion force children to commit such cruel and inhuman crimes? It was reported in a number of newspapers the case of a primary school age boy shooting his mother for advising him to run away from the ISIS camp. The treatment of the women of minority communities like the Yezidis, Christians and Shia of Iraq and Syria, had been brutal and inhuman. The African ISIS outfit called Boko Haram is no less brutal than their Asian counter-parts. They kidnapped some 600 Christian girls, forced them to study by heart the Quran, gang-raped them and then sold many of them in the market as sex-slaves. Recently they showed in of their DVD propaganda shows, some 200 of these girls kept waiting to be sold in the slave market.

Just recently appeared in the newspapers about the gruesome murder in Iraq of some 250 captured girls including some middle-aged women for refusing to become the sex-slaves of the ISIS. The *Indian Express* reports:

"The Islamic State, notorious for its brutality, has reportedly executed 250 girls in northern Iraq for refusing to become sex slaves... The girls had been ordered to accept temporary marriages to the terrorists and

⁸*Indian Express*, "Looking within," March 2, 2015, p.12

were murdered, sometimes alongside their families, for their refusal to be sex slaves in Iraq's second largest city of Mosul. IS began selecting women of Mosul and forced them into marrying its militants, calling it temporary marriage since it has taken control over Mosul."⁹

About the horrible crimes perpetrated by the ISIS on the Yezidi people in Syria, in the first May issue of the *TIME* magazine there is the story of Nadia Murad who escaped from the camp of the ISIS after much torture. She has become a champion for the release of numerous girls imprisoned by ISIS for their sexual gratification. This is what the *TIME* reports:

"At 19 she lost her home, her country, her culture, her mother to murder; witnessed male members of her family murdered in mass killings; and was kidnapped, sold and endlessly raped by members of ISIS. She now travels the world speaking out on the genocide being inflicted on her Yezidi people and demanding release for the more than 3,000 women still held in bondage."¹⁰

The international press has been highlighting the brutal cruelty, with which the Boko Haram had been torturing with impunity, the non-Muslims of north-eastern Nigeria and of the surrounding countries. The Nigerian government with its enormous amount of petro-dollars is made spineless and foolish. Here we shall cite a few lines from the *Indian Express*:

"A new video from Nigeria's home-grown Boko Haram extremists shows gunmen mowing down, and a leader saying they are being killed because they are 'infidels' or non-believers. There are so many corpses the gunmen have difficulty stepping to reach bodies still twitching with life. Most appear to be adult men. We have made sure the floor of his hall is turned red with blood, and this is how it is going to be in all future attacks and arrests of infidels, the group leader says in a message."¹¹

⁹*Indian Express*, "IS executes 250 women for refusing to become sex slaves, says report," April 22, 2016, p.12

¹⁰*TIME*, Eve Ensler, "Nadia Murad A witness for war's victims," May 2-9, 2016, p.24

¹¹*Indian Express*, Haruna Umar, "Boko Haram releases horrific video of slaughter of captives," December 22, 2014, p.9

The number of terrorist attacks by Islamic terrorists seems to be rising continuously. For lack of space, I omit further data.

III. The Root Cause in Islam Itself?

As we have hinted at earlier, fundamentalism and to some extent terrorism are found in practically all the world religions. The Khalistan movement too was a terrorist group in Sikhism confined mostly to Punjab. There are Buddhist fundamentalist groups in Thailand, Burma and Sri Lanka with local interests. Similar groups in Hinduism like Shiv Sena, Sri Ram Sena, Bajrang Dal, etc. are much localized and with very limited supports from the majority of Hindus. But the sad truth is that the Islamic terrorist groups like the ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Taliban and the like seem to have their units all over the world both Muslim and non-Muslim.

According to Taslima Nasreen a liberal Muslim writer, Islamic terrorism is a threat to the whole world:

“Islamic fundamentalism is not a negligible problem. If one wants to address this problem, one has to go to its very roots. Preaching principles of freedom of expression alone won’t do any good. One has to know that mantra makes terrorists tick and influences them to take up arms. It is important to stop indoctrination of children with irrational religious faith at home or institutions like madrasas or mosques. They should be raised to have logical, rational minds and to adopt scientific outlooks that are able to distinguish between right and wrong. I strongly believe that as long as Islam remains unreformed, there can be no end to terror.”¹²

People have become skeptical to the Muslim assertion that Islam is a religion of peace. Recently I came across an article in which the author says that “the biggest joke of the 21st century is the assertion that Islam is a peace-loving religion”.

An Islamic scholar said in an interview:

“We hear, very often, Muslims say: ‘This has nothing to do with Islam.’ This is a spontaneous reaction of Muslims on the street. But, in

¹² *The Times of India*, Taslima Nasreen, “Will Gunmen Get Me Too?” January 13, 2015, p.14

fact, it's a false reaction. This too is a part of Islam. From the beginning there has been some tolerance towards Jews and Christians, but other non-Muslims (unbelievers) had to convert or die. So these fanatics are following this line, with one difference: They call 'unbeliever' (*kafir*) anyone who is not like them, even the Shia, the Yazidi or the Christian.¹³

The same idea of the responsibility of Islam as a whole is shared by Raghu Raman. He says:

"Strategists as well as the political and security leadership continue to christen these attacks based on their location. So we have the Madrid attack, followed by the London attack, the Mumbai attack, and so forth. However, labeling them in this way veils the fact that while each attack saw the targeting of the people of a particular city by a different terror groups, the underlying motivation, training, ideological guidance and other essential ingredients of waging war have the same fountainhead. Therefore, each attack must be given the same degree of global mindshare, regardless of the target city."¹⁴

The American unwillingness, indeed the unwillingness of the West as a whole, to trace the source of fundamentalism and terrorism in Islam itself, leads them clueless for a solution against Islamic terrorism. Thomas Friedman calls it the inability to call spade a spade. Their search for political correctness does not allow them to put blame on Islam in a generalist way. Friedman says:

"When you don't call things by their real name, you always get in trouble. And this administration, so fearful of being accused of Islamophobia, is refusing to make any link to radical Islam from the recent explosions of violence against civilians (most of them Muslims) by Boko Haram in Nigeria, by the Taliban in Pakistan, by al-Qaeda in Paris and by jihadists in Yemen and Iraq.¹⁵

¹³ JIVAN, "Reasons for the rampage," Nov.-Dec. 2014, p.14

¹⁴ *Indian Express*, Raghu Raman, "One world, one battlefield," November 18, 2015, p.11

¹⁵ *Indian Express*, Thomas L. Friedman, "You can't dance around the topic of radical Islam", January 25, 2015, p.7

Non-Americans like us Indians it is not difficult to find the Western unwillingness to go to the source. It is the need of Arab oil controlled chiefly by Saudi Arabia. In the book mentioned earlier *Sleeping with the Devil* the author has pointed out that the Saudi Arabian Islam, centered on Wahhabism, is very much responsible for Islamic terrorism especially the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre.

*a. The Mysterious absence of authoritative
Fatwas against Terrorism*

Fatwa is one of the weapons wielded by the Islamic leadership both religious and political, when the Islamic 'law' is broken, chiefly by the Muslims. In the recent past there have been galore of fatwa's in India alone. These fatwa's have been even in small matters like playing chess, etc. But there had not been serious and authoritative fatwa's against the cruelest and inhuman behaviors of Muslim terrorists like the ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Taliban, Boko Haram and so on.

According to Holy Quran every Muslim should be a "**Witness**" to Allah's mercy and justice. The following verses are just few samples from many:

"O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it is (against) rich or poor: For God can best protect both." (Quran 4:135)

"O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear God, for God is well-acquainted with all that ye do." (Quran 5:8)

"O ye who believe! Cancel not your charity by reminders of your generosity or by injury – like those who spend their substance to be seen of men, but believe neither in God nor in the Last Day." (Quran 2:264)

Islamic preaching with gentleness

"Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious; for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance." (Quran 16:125)

The brutal killing of innocent people like Sisters of Mother Teresa goes directly against many of the teachings of the Quran especially through the above verses. There are many more verses in this Holy Book which command the Muslims to be kind and merciful. Rightly therefore the Islamic columnist and scholar Sadia Dehlvi writes:

“Clearly, the usual response, ‘Islam is a religion of peace’; rings hollow in the midst of the brutalities and slaughter that Muslim terrorists are perpetrating. Sadly, they are succeeding in globally projecting Islam as inherently violent... Nothing defames Islam more than ISIS using the image of Prophet Muhammad’s seal on their flag.”¹⁶

b. The Galore of Fatwas against dubious and unimportant issues

But lo and behold! There have been galore of fatwas in India and other countries on relatively insignificant and dubious matters.

“In a fatwa or religious decree, issued in response to a question from a caller to a Saudi TV show, Grand mufti Sheikh Abdul-Aziz Al-Sheikh said that the game was ‘the work of Satan,’ like alcohol and gambling, despite its long history in the West Asia. Chess is played across the Arab world.”¹⁷

Even against a smaller and dubious issue, the most authoritative body of Indian Islam issued the following Fatwa as reported by various Indian Newspapers. The *Indian Express* wrote:

“Deoband fatwa against chanting ‘Bharat Mata ki Jai’. India’s largest Islamic Seminary *Darool Uloom Deoband*, has issued a fatwa stating Muslims should refrain from chanting the slogan ‘Bharat Mata ki Jai’ as it was against the basic tenets of their religion... The fatwa states that chanting the slogan was against “tauheed”, or the “oneness of Allah” which forms the core of Islam.”¹⁸

¹⁶ *Times of India*, Sadia Dehlvi, “A Muslim Crossroads,” January 22, 2016, p.18

¹⁷ *Times of India*, Ben Hubbard, “Top Saudi cleric forbids chess, calls it un-Islamic,” January 23, 2016, p.13

¹⁸ *Indian Express*, “Deoband fatwa against chanting ‘Bharat Mata ki Jai’,” April 2, 2016, p.1

The figure of speech ‘personification’ does not seem to be opposed to Islam. A poet can personify a bird, animal, tree, plant, star, cloud, etc. but it has to be questioned whether such personifications are against the Muslim tenets or not.

*c. Why no Fatwa against Inhuman Cruelty
against the Nature of Allah?*

There is no fatwa against the most inhuman and barbaric deeds like the torturing and burning of the Jordanian pilot. Practically most Muslims chant the following Quranic verse which is at the beginning of the Holy Book Quran: *Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim* which means Allah is most gracious and most merciful. About this verse the translator and commentator A. Yusuf Ali says: “By universal consent it is rightly placed at the beginning of the Quran, as summing up, in marvelously terse and comprehensive words, man’s relation to God in contemplation and prayer.”¹⁹

Any non-Muslim and most Muslims would accept that the followers, indeed the children (‘*aulad*’) of Allah, should have at least some qualities of mercy and compassion. This has to be fundamental to Islam. At the beginning we have seen the brutal and inhuman cruelty perpetrated by ISIS and its allied branches like Boko-Haram. But the shocking thing is that no noted Muslim leaders or associations including the *Darool Uloom Deoband* did not pronounce any un-ambivalent Fatwa against this behavior which have been carried on for quite some years especially after the 9/11 World Trade Centre. People know that Saudi Arabia and the Arabic states are supporting the terrorists with money and misinterpreted Quranic verses. This duplicity makes the non-Muslims believe that Islamic authorities do not believe that ‘peace is a *desideratum*’ for Muslims. This double-standard in fatwas makes the non-Muslims like the above quoted Western Writer, who wrote “The biggest joke of the 21st century is the Islamic proclamation that Islam is a peace loving religion.”

¹⁹ Holy Quran, Ed. & Tra., A. Yusuf Ali, published by Amana Corp., 4411, 41st St., Brentwood, Maryland 20722, USA, 1983, p.14

There have been some fatwas in the recent past against Islamic terrorist groups. But they are too late and too few. Here below we shall give an example of a recent fatwa:

“About 1.5 million Muslims in India have signed a statement condemning terrorism, and 70,000 Islamic clerics have joined in a *fatwa* condemning the Islamic State. The clerics agreed that terrorist groups should not be recognized as “Islamic organizations.” The dual statements were issued from a Sufi shrine near Ajmer, in the state of Rajasthan, during a religious festival there.”²⁰

IV. Inter-Religious Dialogue and Terrorism-Free World

a. *Islam and Inter-religious Dialogue*

In inter-religious gatherings, the Hindus and Christians often ask whether the Muslims are interested in the welfare of people outside *Umma*, outside the Islamic fold. The works of Aga Khan Trust for universal welfare is looked upon as an exception rather than the rule. Of course nobody called into question the universal love of the *Sufis*. But the truth is that the *Quranic Justice* includes all, including one's enemies.

“O ye who believe stand out firmly for God as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just - that is next to piety - and fear God.” (Quran 5:8).

“It is part of the mercy of God that thou dost deal gently with them. Wert thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: so pass over (their faults), and ask for (God's) forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs (of moment).” (Quran 3:159)

“Nor can goodness and evil be equal. Repel (Evil) with what is better: then will he between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate!” (Quran 41:34)

At the beginning of Islam, it came in contact with the Jews and the Christians whom the *Quran* calls the “People of the Books”. Since

²⁰ Link: <https://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=27926>

these two religions are monotheistic the Muslims found it easy to be open and collaborative towards them. The Quran says in the context of the Jews and Christians: "Our God and your God is One; and it is to whom we bow (in Islam)" (Quran 29:46). We read in the *Rigveda*, "*Ekam Sat viprabahudhavadanti*" (=Truth is one but sages interpret diversely (Rg.1:164:46) and "*Ekamsantambahudhakalpayanti*" (though truth is one, it is diversely imagined (Rg. 10:114:5). The Vedic Hinduism is basically monotheistic though the Ultimate Reality is imagined diversely during the different stages of its evolution. With this understanding of Hinduism Muslims may find easy to cooperate with the Hindus also. The tolerant attitude towards other religions is pretty much obvious in the following texts:

"O ye that reject faith. I worship not that which ye worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship." (Quran 109:1-3)

"To you be your way and to me mine." (Quran 109:6)

"There shall be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error." (Quran 2:256)

"If it had been thy Lord's will, they would all have believed, - all who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe!" (Quran 10:99)

To each among you have prescribed a Law and an open way. If God had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute (Quran 5:48).

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair), of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other. (Not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all these things) (Quran 49:13). (Cfr. Also 2:213; 10:19; 30:21)

The Persian mystic Sa'di (AD.1292) gives the following mystical interpretation of this universalistic spirit of the Quran:

"Adam's posterity is like the members of a body, since they are all made of the same matter. If fate gives pain to one, all the others get to feel it too. You who do not feel sympathy for the pain of another, you cannot be called human."²¹

The Muslim call for prayer is for *falah* (welfare): "Come ye unto the *salat*. Come ye unto the *falah*". Kenneth Cragg in his well-known book *The Call of the Minaret* explains *falah* thus: "*Falah* is not then, some pietistic abstraction, nor the indulgence of a private sanctity. It is the true state of welfare, the prosperity of the people of God, fulfilled in communal existence and realized in social life."²²

In the context of Inter-religious dialogue these concepts for universal welfare are rightly interpreted to include not only the 'People of the Books' but also all the children of Adam and Eve, created in God's own image. In Islam there is the prescription of legal almsgiving (*zakat*), one of the five pillars of Islam, and of *riba* (prohibition of interest), an invitation to practice the values of the Universal Family. Asghar Ali Engineer says:

"However, many radical thinkers among Muslims rightly feel that *riba* should not be taken to mean interest only but exploitation in general. Any practice which leads to exploitation of man by man including unjust profit (industrial as well as commercial) should be treated as *riba*."²³

It is obvious that there are a number of texts in the Quran which give universal openness and concern beyond the *Umma*, though we cited just a few texts.²⁴ The Prophet himself and the early Caliphs like Umar Ibn-al-Khattab and Harun al-Rashid were concerned about the welfare not only of the Muslims but also of that of the conquered people. Here we have not given the true interpretation of *jihad* which is an injunction to fight against evil as perpetrated by certain tyrants

²¹ Quoted by Sebastian Vempeny, *Minorities in Contemporary India*, New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers and Distributors, 2003, p.361

²² New York: OUP, 1956, p.140

²³ *Justice, Women and Communal Harmony in Islam*, New Delhi: 1989, p.20

²⁴ For a more extensive study, Cfr. Sebastian Vempeny, *Op. Cit.*, pp.354-67

who chase out poor and helpless people from their homes (Quran 2:39-40). Even in such jihads too there should be justice. "And fight in the way of God with those who fight with you, and do not exceed, for God does not love those who exceed the limits (Quran 2:190).

b. Two Basic Principles for openness to Other Religions

1. The Axiom 'The Context Changes the Text'

One of the chief assumptions of contextual theology, especially of Liberation Theology is the saying that *context changes the text*. This assumption is today accepted almost as an axiom. The context of a person is not just his mind-set but some sort of mental category, *a la* Kantian Categories, through which the subject tries to reach the *Noumenon*. Let us take the example of a film like *The Bandit Queen*. In this film what would strike the high-caste Hindus and what would strike the oppressed caste of Phoolan Devi herself must have been very different. The high-caste Hindus might not have found anything abominable or even strange in the approving looks of the wives of the men who were raping her or parading her naked through the length and breadth of the village. How different must have been the perception, both in details and in substance, of the women of the caste of Phoolan Devi! One might say that in films people would perceive what they are interested in, on the conscious or the unconscious level. This is the psychological aspect of the influence of the context.

Oxford Companion to Mind says: "...the direct realism of immediate experience of the object world has been abandoned. It is now, however, fairly, generally accepted that stored knowledge and assumptions actively affect even the simplest perceptions." There is a hymn in the NT sung by Mary, the Mother of Jesus. After citing a few verses we shall point out the problem:

'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord
and my spirit *exults in God my saviour*;
because *he has taken upon his lowly handmaid*.
He has shown the power of his arm,
he has routed the proud of heart.

*He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly.
The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty
away. (Lk. 1:46,47,51,52)*

According to the *Liberation Theologians*, a poor and downtrodden person would see in the above well-known Biblical hymn called *Magnificat*, the challenging cry for justice by an oppressed and unjustly treated woman rather than the lyrical song of praise by a leisurely, rich lady thanking God for her abundance. In the past it was the elite of society who interpreted this hymn and sung solemnly in five voices. But for persons who suffer oppression and injustice it is a revolutionary song, which needs completely a new revolutionary tune and a thoroughly new interpretation. But there are other epistemological aspects too in the above-said axiom that context changes the text.

From the time of Heisenburg even scientists began to take for granted the subjective elements even in the most 'objective' physio-chemical sciences. It is much more so in human sciences like history and sociology. William James used to say that in Love, Politics, and in Religion people prove what they want to prove because they have to prove it. The same thing happens to the terrorists. They interpret the Quranic texts according to the needs of their terroristic activities.

2. Re-reading the Scriptures according to the Contextual Challenges

Some time back, I had the privilege of attending an international seminar organized by a group of secular persons from different parts of the world. One of the main topics of this seminar was *The Humane Face of Socially Engaged Hinduism*. The participants including those from the West, were well aware of the common and uncritical understanding of Hinduism, as a world-denying religion with no concern for the sufferings and miseries of fellow human beings, be it poverty, disease or caste-discrimination.

They were also aware of another uncritical assumption about Hinduism. It is that because of the Hindu belief in *Sanchit Karma* (accumulated evil effects of the actions of the previous birth) the victims of contagious diseases, social marginalization, economic injustice etc.

suffer in the present birth as a just punishment for their sinful deeds in the previous birth. Hence, others would have no serious responsibility of trying to alleviate their sufferings since they suffer what they deserve. Some would go so far as to say that Hinduism does not consider society or evil social structures having anything to do with man's present miseries.

Not only the Hindu participants but also the Non-Hindus felt that such views are downright exaggerations. All the same, most were aware that there is a grain of truth in these assumptions. It is precisely the awareness of this grain of truth, which made some Hindu and Non-Hindu scholars come together and organize this seminar for discovering and exposing the compassionate and socially engaged face of Hinduism.

During the reading of a number of scholarly papers and during the discussions that followed, we could come across a number of traditions, rituals, festivals etc. which showed the deeply compassionate face of Hinduism. There were scholars who could parade numerous scriptural statements from the *Vedas* to the mediaeval and modern *bhakti* literature (sacred writings of the saints and mystics like Jnaneshvar, Manickvasagar and Kabir), which teach compassion and concern for fellow human beings. Here we had the experience of what the Liberation Theologians call "hermeneutical suspicion and re-reading the scriptures from the context". This was followed by an action plan highlighting these traditions and scriptural injunctions, which promote compassion and socio-economic justice.

A word more on this concept of re-reading the scriptures in a situation of religious pluralism is in order. The ISIS and other terrorist groups pick up a few Quranic verses which are challenges to other religions. But they ignore many other texts which are open to other religions. But to be open to such texts we should have desire for peace and unity. If we are approaching other religions with hatred and revengefulness and carrying AK-47, we can never find the friendly texts in the Quran or the similar texts in other religions. When the Christians and the Muslims begin their inter-religious dialogue, both groups should develop openness towards each other and desire to be a true "child of God"/to be a "true witness to Allah".

